

# *Political and Social Innovations of the French Revolution and Napoleon, c. 1780 to 1815*



Harold M. Hutchings

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The French Revolution and Napoleon Hutchings  
Learning Standards in this book are “DIMENSION 2. Applying Disciplinary Concepts and Tools” in the subject of History from *The College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards: Guidance for Enhancing the Rigor of K-12 Civics, Economics, Geography, and History* published by the **National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)**, Silver Spring, Maryland USA. Learning Objectives in each chapter are aligned with the Standards indicated in each chapter.

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# Preface

Dear Reader,

As a high school history teacher, I have spent many years in the classroom, sharing my passion for history with students and helping them navigate the rich and complex narratives that have shaped our world. Over time, I have developed a collection of class notes that not only serve as a guide through the curriculum but also aim to make history come alive for my students. It is with great pleasure that I present this book, a compilation of those notes, to both my colleagues and students.

To my fellow educators, while there are many other great, and highly detailed textbooks available to use, this book is intended as a resource to enhance your own strategies when teaching this topic. The notes and explanations within these pages have been crafted and refined through countless lessons, discussions, and feedback from students. My hope is that you will find these topics useful in your own classrooms, whether as a supplement to your existing material or as inspiration for new ideas to teaching history. Sharing these notes is my way of contributing to our collective goal of providing the best possible education to our students.

To the students, this book is designed to be a companion on your journey through history. It is my hope that these notes will help you take better, more organized notes in class and provide a reliable reference for reinforcement of the material. Whether you are revisiting a topic covered in class, catching up on missed content, or preparing for exams, I trust that this book will serve as a valuable tool in your academic success. The notes are presented in a way that mirrors how I teach, making it easier for you to connect what you read here with our classroom discussions.

The overarching goal of this book is to enrich the learning environment. By making these notes accessible, I aim to bridge gaps, clarify concepts, and provide a deeper understanding of history's many facets. I believe that by sharing our knowledge and resources, we can create a more engaging and supportive educational experience for everyone involved.

Thank you for joining me on this journey. I am excited to see how these notes will be used and adapted in your own learning and teaching experiences.

Warm regards,

*Mr. Hutchings*

High School History Teacher

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# Histological Viewpoints: Interpretations of the French Revolution and Napoleon Bonaparte

The French Revolution and the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte are crucial events in history. For students studying this era, exploring different historiographical viewpoints is essential. These perspectives offer various interpretations and analyses, providing a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the French Revolution and Napoleon's impact.

## **Understanding Historiographical Viewpoints**

Historiographical viewpoints help students recognize that history is not just a series of fixed facts but is subject to interpretation. Different historians have different ways of understanding and explaining the events and causes of the French Revolution and Napoleon's reign. For instance, a Marxist historian might emphasize the conflict between social classes, viewing the revolution as an inevitable clash between the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy. In contrast, a revisionist historian might focus on the specific policies of the French monarchy as primary causes. By examining these different interpretations, students learn that history is complex and that multiple perspectives can coexist.

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## **Enhancing Critical Thinking and Analytical Skills**

Engaging with various historiographical viewpoints also enhances critical thinking and analytical skills. When students are exposed to different perspectives on the French Revolution and Napoleon, they are encouraged to compare and contrast these viewpoints, assess the evidence supporting each one, and develop their own informed opinions. For example, comparing the traditional view, which blames the monarchy for the revolution, with the revisionist view, which criticizes broader societal issues, helps students understand the strengths and weaknesses of each argument. This process fosters a more nuanced understanding of the French Revolution and Napoleon's era and teaches students to think critically about historical narratives.

### **Recognizing Subjectivity and Bias in Historical Writing**

Historiographical viewpoints teach students about the subjectivity and bias inherent in historical writing. Every historian has their own perspective, influenced by their background, culture, and personal beliefs. Recognizing these biases helps students read historical texts more critically. For example, understanding that a historian writing during Napoleon's time might have different biases than one writing many years later allows students to see how historical interpretations can change over time. This awareness of bias and subjectivity is crucial for developing a critical approach to studying history.

## **Broadening Perspectives Through Diverse Historiographical Schools**

Studying different historiographical schools also broadens students' perspectives by exposing them to diverse ways of understanding the French Revolution and Napoleon Bonaparte. This includes political, economic, social, and cultural histories. For instance, learning about the Annales School, which focuses on long-term social structures, can complement the more event-driven political histories of the French Revolution. By exploring different aspects of the revolution, such as its impact on everyday life in France, students gain a fuller picture of the era and its consequences.

## **Developing Research Skills**

Historiographical study develops research skills by encouraging students to engage with a wide range of sources and methodologies. Understanding historiography involves reading secondary sources critically and situating them within broader scholarly debates. For example, a student researching the Reign of Terror might examine how interpretations have shifted over time, from early accounts focusing on the political turmoil to later studies highlighting the social and economic factors. This process helps students learn to navigate and synthesize complex historiographical debates, making them more adept researchers.

## Evolving Historiographical Perspectives

Students learn that historiography itself evolves. This helps them understand how historical interpretations are influenced by contemporary events and trends in scholarly thought, showing the dynamic nature of historical study. For instance, the shift from traditional diplomatic histories of the French Revolution to the inclusion of social and cultural histories reflects broader changes in academic focus and societal interests. This evolution demonstrates that history is not static but is constantly being reinterpreted and reassessed considering new evidence and perspectives.

## Contributing Original Insights

By understanding historiographical debates, students are encouraged to contribute original insights and perspectives. Recognizing gaps or biases in existing historiography can inspire new research questions and innovative approaches. For example, a student who notices that certain marginalized groups are underrepresented in the historiography of the French Revolution might choose to focus their research on these groups, contributing to a more inclusive historical narrative.

## Common Historiographical Schools of Thought

### Interpretation of the Marxist School of History on the French Revolution and Napoleon

The Marxist interpretation of the French Revolution views it as a fundamental and progressive shift from feudalism to capitalism, driven by class struggle. Marxist historians argue

The French Revolution and Napoleon

Hutchings

that the Revolution was primarily a bourgeois revolution, where the rising middle class (the bourgeoisie) overthrew the feudal aristocracy and established a capitalist society. Napoleon's rise and the Napoleonic Wars are seen as a continuation of this process, consolidating the gains of the Revolution and spreading revolutionary ideas across Europe.

"The French Revolution is a particularly dramatic instance of the rise of the bourgeoisie against feudal privileges, and its triumph was a necessary condition for the development of modern capitalism."

Soboul, Albert. *A Short History of the French Revolution, 1789-1799*. University of California Press, 1977.

#### *Criticism of the Marxist School's Historical View*

The Marxist interpretation has been criticized for its deterministic and economic reductionist approach, often neglecting the complexities of political and ideological factors. Critics argue that this view oversimplifies the Revolution by portraying it purely as a class struggle and overlooks the diverse motives and contributions of various groups.

"The Marxist interpretation tends to ignore the significant role of political ideas and the diversity of revolutionary actors, reducing the French Revolution to a mere economic and class-based conflict."

Furet, François. *Interpreting the French Revolution*. Cambridge UP, 1981.

## Interpretation of the Annales School of History on the French Revolution and Napoleon

The Annales School emphasizes a long-term historical perspective, focusing on the structures and mentalities that underlie historical events rather than individual actions or short-term political changes. In the context of the French Revolution and Napoleon, historians from the Annales School might explore how geographical, economic, social, and cultural factors shaped the events and experiences of this period. They often analyze the Revolution and Napoleon's era not just as a series of dramatic political changes but as part of broader, longer-term transformations in French society and mentality.

"The French Revolution cannot be understood merely as a sequence of political events; it must be seen in the context of profound and long-lasting social, economic, and cultural changes that transformed the lives of ordinary people."

Lefebvre, Georges. *The French Revolution*. Routledge, 1962.

### *Criticism of the Annales School's Historical View*

Critics of the Annales School argue that its focus on long-term structures and mentalities can sometimes overlook the significance of individual actions, political decisions, and specific events. This approach may lead to an underestimation of the importance of political agency and the immediate impacts of historical events.

"The Annales School, with its emphasis on long-term structures, often underestimates the role of individual agency and the transformative power of significant historical events, such as the French Revolution and Napoleon's reign."

Garrard, John. "The Annales School: Critique and Defense." *History and Theory*, vol. 27, no. 2, 1988, pp. 195-205.

### Interpretation of the Postmodern School of History on the French Revolution and Napoleon

The Postmodern School of history emphasizes the subjective nature of historical narratives, questioning the possibility of an objective or singular truth about the past. In the context of the French Revolution and Napoleon, postmodern historians focus on the various narratives, discourses, and representations that have shaped our understanding of these events. They often explore how different groups and individuals constructed their versions of the Revolution and Napoleon's rule, highlighting the role of language, power, and ideology in shaping historical knowledge.

"The French Revolution is not a monolithic event with a single interpretation but a series of narratives constructed by different actors, each with their own agendas and biases."

Hunt, Lynn. *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*. University of California Press, 1992.

### *Criticism of the Postmodern School's Historical View*

Critics argue that the Postmodern School's emphasis on relativism and the constructed nature of history can lead to a denial of objective reality or factuality in historical events. This perspective may sometimes be seen as undermining the possibility of historical knowledge or making it difficult to establish any coherent understanding of the past.

"Postmodernism's radical relativism risks reducing history to mere discourse, undermining the possibility of discerning objective truths or facts about events like the French Revolution and Napoleon's era."

Evans, Richard J. *In Defence of History*. Granta Books, 1997.

### *Interpretation of the Social School of History on the French Revolution and Napoleon*

The Social School of history emphasizes the roles of social classes, economic structures, and demographic changes in shaping historical events. In the context of the French Revolution and Napoleon, this approach focuses on the social dynamics and class conflicts that drove the Revolution, including the grievances of the Third Estate, the influence of bourgeois interests, and the conditions of the peasantry. The Social School also examines how Napoleon's policies impacted different social groups, particularly in terms of social mobility, land distribution, and legal reforms.

"The French Revolution was fundamentally a social revolution, born out of the demands and struggles of the lower classes, whose collective actions reshaped the social and political landscape of France."

Soboul, Albert. *The Sans-Culottes: The Popular Movement and Revolutionary Government, 1793-1794*. Princeton UP, 1980.

#### *Criticism of the Social School's Historical View*

Critics argue that the Social School's focus on class and social structures can sometimes lead to an oversimplification of the Revolution, neglecting other factors such as political ideas, cultural movements, and individual agency. This approach may downplay the role of ideology and the influence of key personalities in shaping events.

"The Social School's emphasis on class struggle often neglects the complexity of political ideologies and the significant roles played by individuals, reducing the Revolution to a mere social and economic conflict."

Furet, François. *Interpreting the French Revolution*. Cambridge UP, 1981.

# Chapter 1 - The origins of the French Revolution, c1780-87

## Important Keywords

**Age of Enlightenment**

**Three Estates**

**American War of Independence**

**Taille**

**French Revolution**

**Tithe**

**Absolute Monarchy**

*In the minds of contemporaries, the Enlightenment laid the groundwork for the Revolution's most important ideas and agendas.*

*Historian Margaret Jacob*

## Learning Standards:

### **Change, Continuity, and Context**

D2.His.1.9-12. Evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place as well as broader historical contexts.

### **Perspectives**

D2.His.4.9-12. Analyze complex and interacting factors that influenced the perspectives of people during different historical eras

### **Historical Sources and Evidence**

D2.His.9.9-12. Analyze the relationship between historical sources and the secondary interpretations made from them.

### **Causation and Argumentation**

D2.His.14.9-12. Analyze multiple and complex causes and effects of events in the past.

## Learning Objectives:

### **Learning Standard: Change, Continuity, and Context (D2.His.1.9-12)**

**Objective:** Students will evaluate how the unique economic, social, and political circumstances of France in the late 18th century, along with broader historical contexts such as the Enlightenment and previous European revolutions, shaped the origins of the French Revolution.

### **Learning Standard: Perspectives (D2.His.4.9-12)**

**Objective:** Students will analyze the complex and interacting factors that influenced the perspectives of various groups in pre-revolutionary France, including the monarchy, the nobility, the bourgeoisie, and the peasantry, and how these perspectives contributed to revolutionary sentiments.

### **Learning Standard: Historical Sources and Evidence**

#### **(D2.His.9.9-12)**

**Objective:** Students will analyze primary sources from the period leading up to the French Revolution, such as letters, political pamphlets, and financial records, and compare these with secondary interpretations to understand how historians construct narratives about the origins of the French Revolution.

**Learning Standard: Causation and Argumentation  
(D2.His.14.9-12)**

**Objective:** Students will analyze the multiple and complex causes of the French Revolution, including economic distress, social inequality, political mismanagement, and Enlightenment ideas, and construct well-supported arguments about the relative significance of these factors in contributing to the revolutionary outbreak in 1789.

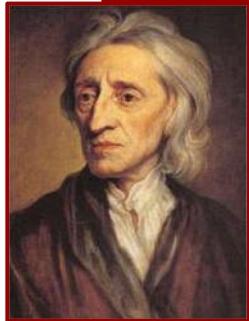
## 1.1 The long-term causes: the influence of the Enlightenment

Between 1685 and 1815, Europe experienced drastic changes in politics, philosophy, and science. This period is often referred to as the **Age of Reason**, or simply the **Enlightenment**. Thinkers from France and Britain began to question traditional authority, which was the Catholic Church, on beliefs about the existence of humanity.

Amidst the long existence of the Enlightenment before the outbreak of the French Revolution, historians suggest that it was one of the major causes of the revolution.

The emergence of the **ideas of liberty, equality, and individual rights**, which overthrew the reign of King Louis XVI, was influenced by published writing of Enlightenment thinkers.

Enlightenment thinkers and writers greatly influenced revolutionaries to question how feudal society and authority in France worked.



**Image of Enlightenment thinkers Baron de Montesquieu (top left), Jean Jacques Rousseau (top right), and John Locke (bottom)**



Feudalism was a Medieval European system in which administrative control was based on distribution of land.

## THE AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT

Out of intellectual, political, and social desire for progress, thinkers in the 1600s until the 18th century challenged the existing body of knowledge explaining humanity and the natural world.

During this period, use of scientific process, reasoning, and logic saw traditional knowledge replaced with skepticism. Moreover, inventions and discoveries struck Europe. At the same time, European domination in Asia and Africa were intensified following exploration and colonization of the Americas.

In France, Enlightenment thinkers condemned censorship. Liberal thought, which focused on democratic values, spread.



Prior to the Age of Enlightenment, knowledge of the world was derived from religious teachings and ancient beliefs.

### Fundamentals of liberal thought:

- ✓ Rights of the individual
- ✓ Natural equality of men
- ✓ Separation of powers
- ✓ Political power through representation of the people

Aside from its effects on politics, the Enlightenment era created religious conflict in Europe.

## 1.2 The long-term causes: the impact in France of involvement in the American War of Independence

The American War of Independence was a political battle that took place between 1765 and 1783 during which

The French Revolution and Napoleon colonists in the Thirteen American Colonies rejected the British monarchy and aristocracy, overthrew the authority of Great Britain, and founded the United States of America.

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On February 6, 1778, France made an alliance with the American revolutionaries. Through the Treaty of Amity and Commerce and the Treaty of Alliance signed in Paris, France began to send fleets and armies.

Years after the victory of the American colonists they assisted, the French faced their own political struggle. Scholars suggest that the American Revolutionary War set the stage for the French uprising.

### **Why did France participate in the American Revolutionary War?**

France was Britain's colonial rival. After the defeat in the Seven Years' War, France wanted to restore its reputation.

### **French participation**

Between 1778 and 1783, the French supplied the colonists with arms, munitions, and supplies. Moreover, several French troops and ships were sent to the colonies.

In 1776, diplomat Benjamin Franklin was able to secure a formal alliance with France.

In October 1777, after the colonists' victory at the Battle of Saratoga, French King Louis XVI approved Franklin's request for financial assistance.

At the course of the American Revolution, about 12,000 French soldiers and 32,000 sailors, including Marquis de Lafayette, arrived in America.

Scholars suggest that the French alliance and assistance were crucial in the British defeat at Yorktown.

In 1780, the French led by commander Rochambeau landed at Rhode Island. In the same year, the Franco-

American alliance marched south and besieged British General Charles Cornwallis at Yorktown.



In 1783, the Treaty of Paris formally ended the war between the American colonists and their allies, France and Spain, against Britain.

### **Effects of the war to France**

Amidst the intervention, the war failed to weaken Great Britain globally. After the war, Britain remained the main trading partner of America not France.

Due to the assistance provided, the French government faced a financial crisis, which led to political and social unrest in France.

### **Effects of the war on France**

As a result of supporting the war effort financially, France faced a debt disaster and in order to resolve this, the government raised taxes and used loans to pay off debts.

During the war, trade diminished and was only revived in 1783.

In addition to stronger trade relations between the new United States and France which never materialized, the United States proclaimed its neutrality over the war between Britain and France in 1793.



Image depicting the ratification of the Treaty of Paris in 1783.

### 1. 3 The long-term causes: the Three Estates - their duties and privileges

#### **FIRST ESTATE: Clergy**

Known as Le Premier Etats, they were religious leaders which made up about 1% of the population.

Members were exempted from paying any taxes.

#### **SECOND ESTATE: Nobility**

Composed of nobility and the elite, Le Deuxième Etats were about 4% of the population. A member had to be born into the aristocracy and were exempted from most taxes.

**THIRD ESTATE: Commoners**

Consisted of the peasantry, Le Troisieme Etats was 95% of the French population, which included the working class who were taxpayers.

The estates of the realm under the *Ancien Régime* were characterized by the burden of taxation. The king was not part of any estates.

Under feudalism, the peasantry who were members of the Third Estate produced food and paid heavy taxes.



Among the main source of royal income was taille, a direct land tax paid by the peasantry. The clergy and nobles were exempted from paying taille.

**FRENCH TAXATION****Three Kinds of Provinces**

1. Pays d'élection - Long-held possession of the French crown in which collection of taxes were originally tasked to elected officials. Later on, such a position was sold. Personal taxes were paid by commoners.
2. Pays d'état - Tax assessment and collection were trusted to local councils. Real tax was attached to non-noble lands.
3. Pays d'imposition - Royal administrators served as overseers of recently conquered lands subjected to taxation.



Both peasants and nobles were required to pay tithe, or one-tenth of their income to the church. On the other hand, the church was obliged to pay the crown tax known as “free gift.”

Prior to the French Revolution, members of the peasantry were required to pay land tax to the state and 5% property tax. Royal obligations were paid through labor, in kind, and in coin (rare). Moreover, peasant farmers paid their landlords in cash.

In addition to the tax burden, people from the Third Estate were forbidden from holding petty positions in the regime. Both kings Louis XV and XIV attempted to impose taxes on the First and Second Estates but failed.

### 1.4 The long-term causes: the role of Louis XVI, the unpopularity of Marie Antoinette

Born as Louis-Auguste, Louis XVI was the last king of France before the end of the monarchy in the French Revolution. Married to Marie Antoinette, Archduchess of Austria, daughter of Holy Roman Emperor Francis I, Louis XVI (and his wife) were convicted of high treason and were executed by guillotine on October 16, 1793.



### **Image of French monarchs, King Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette**

At the time of King Louis XVI, absolute monarchy ruled France. Monarchs enjoyed unlimited power and viewed themselves as representatives of God. With such high regard for themselves, many French monarchs including Louis XVI and his wife lived in luxury and extravagance in Versailles.

By the time of Louis XVI's ascension to the throne, France was under serious economic crisis. In 1774, the king appointed Turgot as finance minister. Expenditure of the royal court was reduced, and more taxes were imposed. By 1776, Necker replaced Turgot, he published a report on the income and expenditure of the state.

In 1783, Callone became the finance minister. He adapted the borrowing policy to compensate for the expenditure of the royal court which resulted in huge national debt.

When Louis XVI made an alliance with the American colonists during the American Revolution, he brought

France to the verge of bankruptcy. Imposition of new taxes to cover national debt deeply enraged people in France, especially the members of the Third Estate. Moreover, when the price of bread reached its height, Louis XVI implemented deregulation of the grain market which caused famine.



Absolute monarchy is a form of government in which a society is completely ruled by one monarch.

On August 8, 1788, the king summoned the Estates-General in an attempt to solve the financial crisis. Out of desperation and lack of political voice, representatives of the Third Estate declared a National Assembly in June 1789. In response, Louis XVI locked the chamber doors. The Third Estate then moved to a tennis court and swore to give France a constitution. This event came to be known as the Tennis Court Oath.

Through an arranged marriage, Marie Antoinette married Louis XVI at the age of 15. Given her relation to the Habsburg dynasty that pulled France into the costly Seven Years' War, Marie Antoinette was unpopular with French citizens. At an early stage, she was accused of being sympathetic to the enemies of France.

The French Queen was known for her extravagant taste and socializing. She was one of the aristocrats who defended the privileges of the First and Second Estates in terms of taxation.

## 1.5 The long-term causes: the reasons for and extent of financial problems, policies of Necker, the problem of poor harvests

Throughout the 1700s, France participated in a number of costly wars, including the Seven Years' War and the American War of Independence. With such expensive financial support of the American colonists, France verged on bankruptcy. King Louis XVI's attempts to solve the French financial crisis led to a revolution of the third estate. Moreover, extravagant expenditure of the royal courts amidst the crisis caused resentment of the peasantry.

Years before the outbreak of the Revolution, weather conditions resulted in poor harvests. As a result, food production diminished, and many suffered famine. Due to poor harvests, the price of flour increased, which directly increased the price of bread. Bread was a staple food of commoners. With such shortages of food, members of the peasantry were angered by King Louis XVI's inability to solve the food crisis.

In 1776, Jacques Necker, a Swiss-born banker was appointed by King Louis XVI as finance minister of the French royal treasury.



At the height of the grain crisis in France, Necker banned cereal exports as a measure to bolster local grains stocks and self-sufficiency. Among his financial measures was the use of loans rather than taxes to fund French debt. In 1781, he published the first report on the income and expenditure of the royal court. As a result, he accumulated a number of enemies in the royal court.

## Glossary of terms

**French Revolution** - A political and social upheaval in France that broke out in 1789 and ended in 1799, which ended the rule of French absolute monarchy.

**Absolute Monarchy** - A form of government in which a society is completely ruled by one monarch.

**Feudalism** - A Medieval European system in which administrative control was based on distribution of land.

**American Revolution** - Also known as the American War of Independence, it was a political battle between 1765 and 1783 during which colonists in the Thirteen American Colonies rejected the British monarchy and aristocracy, overthrew the authority of Great Britain, and founded the United States of America.

**Three Estates** - The estates of the realm under the *Ancien Régime* were characterized by the burden of taxation. The king was not part of any estates.

**Age Of Enlightenment** - Also known as the Age of Reason, it was a period in European history characterized by the ideas of liberty, equality, and science.

## Thinking Time

### Source A:



### Source B:



To what extent did economic challenges, as opposed to political challenges, lead to a crisis in the *Ancien Régime* by 1789? Use Sources A and B and your own knowledge.

# Chapter 2 - Short-term causes of the Revolution: from Assembly of Notables to Estates General, 1787-89

## Important Keywords

**Estates General**

**Grande Peur**

**Assembly of Notables**

**Bastille**

**National Assembly**

**Parlement**

*An assembly of notables was an expanded version of the king's council. Several times each year, whenever the king needed to cast a wider net in search of information... he would enlarge his council with personalities chosen... for their 'zeal' and their 'devotion', their 'fidelity' to the sovereign... Such an assembly was not an abbreviated version of the Estates-General.*

*Historian, Roland Mousnier*

## Learning Standards:

### **Change, Continuity, and Context**

D2.His.1.9-12. Evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place as well as broader historical contexts.

## Perspectives

D2.His.4.9-12. Analyze complex and interacting factors that influenced the perspectives of people during different historical eras

## Historical Sources and Evidence

D2.His.9.9-12. Analyze the relationship between historical sources and the secondary interpretations made from them.

## Causation and Argumentation

D2.His.14.9-12. Analyze multiple and complex causes and effects of events in the past.

## Learning Objectives:

### Learning Standard: Change, Continuity, and Context (D2.His.1.9-12)

**Objective:** Students will evaluate how the short-term events, such as the Assembly of Notables and the Estates General, were shaped by the unique economic crises and political pressures of the late 1780s, as well as broader historical contexts, including the decline of royal authority and Enlightenment thinking.

### Learning Standard: Perspectives (D2.His.4.9-12)

**Objective:** Students will analyze the complex and interacting factors that influenced the perspectives of different social groups, including the clergy, nobility, and Third Estate, during the period from 1787 to 1789, and how these perspectives reflected broader societal changes and conflicts.

**Learning Standard: Historical Sources and Evidence  
(D2.His.9.9-12)**

**Objective:** Students will analyze primary sources from the Assembly of Notables and Estates General, such as speeches, pamphlets, and official records, and evaluate how historians use these sources to interpret the short-term causes of the French Revolution.

**Learning Standard: Causation and Argumentation  
(D2.His.14.9-12)**

**Objective:** Students will analyze the multiple and complex causes leading to the calling of the Estates General, including financial crises, political missteps, and social unrest, and construct well-reasoned arguments about the significance of these events in precipitating the French Revolution.

## 2.1 The short-term causes: the Assembly of Notables (1787)

Due to extravagant spending of the royal court, insufficient revenue, and national debt, France experienced a fiscal crisis and was on the brink of bankruptcy. In response, with the advice of financial advisor Charles Alexandre de Calonne, King Louis XVI called upon the Assembly of Notables.

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

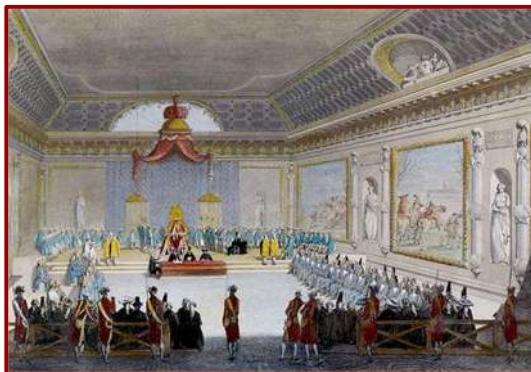
Similar to the Estates-General, the Assembly of Notables was an ancient institution in France which was rarely used. At the king's order, a council composed of clergymen and nobles formed an assembly to respond during a time of crisis and be the crown's advisors. About three assemblies

(1583, 1596, 1626) prior to 1787 were convened under a king's order.



The Assembly of Notables, as its name indicates, was a council composed of members from the First and Second Estates.

In February 1787, about 144 members composed of nobles, bishops, magistrates, deputies, and mayors gathered at Versailles and convened the Assembly of Notables. Calonne requested Louis XVI to convene the assembly to pass fiscal reforms without the debate of the parlement.



**Image depicting the 1787 Assembly of Notables**



The French parlement was then composed of high courts which often reject tax reforms as it would negatively affect them

## 2.2 The short-term causes: the policies of Calonne and Brienne and their consequences

Amidst having no independent legislative power, Calonne sought the formation of the Assembly of Notables in 1787 to put pressure on the parlement to support his fiscal reforms. However, members of the Notables did not support Calonne's reform package. The assembly believed that any major reforms that would greatly affect the Three Estates should be approved by the Estates-General.

### Four major fiscal reforms proposed by Calonne

**Unitary land tax** - In contrast to *vingtièmes*, the new single

land tax would be payable in kind<sup>1</sup>, thus making it free from inflation. Moreover, it would affect all landowners regardless of social rank. Assessment would be according to property value and collection to be supervised by a local intendant.



Vingtième was a form of income tax that nobles were usually exempt from.

**Commutation of the corvée** - Corvée was a form of forced labor on public highways which he proposed to be converted to monetary contribution to be spent for a different purpose.

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<sup>1</sup> Payment-in-kind (PIK) is the use of a good or service as payment instead of cash.

**Abolition of internal tariff** - Calonne proposed complete freedom of the grain trade and temporary suspension of export. Moreover, he suggested fairer tax collection through proportional taxation which did not exempt the elite.

**Election of provincial assemblies** - Similar to Turgot, Calonne sought democratic reforms to free the provinces from corruption and buying of positions by the elite class.



**Image of Charles Alexandre Calonne**

The formation of the Assembly of Notables did not help Calonne with his fiscal proposals. As another measure, he sought public support through publication of the French fiscal problems and his attempts to solve it. As a result, the

The French Revolution and Napoleon

Hutchings

public knew about the nation's deficit of **110 million livres**<sup>2</sup>.

By April 7, 1787, Calonne was dismissed by both the Notables and King Louis XVI and immediately replaced by Loméni de Brienne, Bishop of Toulouse.



Image of Loméni de Brienne

Like Calonne, Brienne pushed for the same fiscal policies. The difference they made; Brienne was a favorite of Marie Antoinette which made him an influential figure in the royal court. Moreover, he was a member of the Assembly of Notables prior to his appointment as fiscal director.

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<sup>2</sup> 1 livre equaled 1 lb. of silver. In 2019, that was equivalent to around 25 billion pounds

## 2.3 The short-term causes: the key events of 1789 and their causes and consequences, including the meeting of the Estates General

Both following Turgotian policies, Calonne and Brienne had very few fiscal reforms. Brienne proposed to increase tax contributions from the church, however, both the parlement and the Assembly of Notables rejected the idea of imposing new land tax on the members of the First and Second Estate.

With Brienne's further attempts to impose Calonne's reforms, he developed conflict with the parlement who insisted that only the Estates-General had the right and power to tax.

### THE ESTATES GENERAL

*Estats Généraux* in French, the Estates General was a form of representative assembly similar to a congress or parliament. Members were representatives from the Three Estates. Different to congress or parliament, French Estates General had no legislative power and did not meet regularly. Meetings were only held as summoned by the king, mostly in times of crisis or war.

In 1302, King Philip IV summoned the first Estates General at a time of conflict with the Pope. By the 15th and 16th centuries, the Estates General convened as an advisory body on political and financial crises. Prior to the French Revolution, the Estates General was last convened in 1614. Neither Kings Louis XIV nor Louis XV did not summon the assembly as they found it unnecessary under absolute monarchy.



**Image of French King Philip IV**

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In 1787, as Brienne proposed his fiscal reforms which included new taxes, the Paris parlement disagreed and demanded the Three Estates combined had the power to approve such taxes. Tensions increased and triggered an eight-month conflict between the royal government and the parlements. In late 1787, in order to win over the Paris parlement, Louis XVI promised to convene the Estates General for 1792.

Ahead by three years, Louis XVI summoned the Estates General on August 8, 1788, after the notorious ‘Day of Tiles.’

### **Traditional voting procedure and composition of Estates General**

Traditionally, members of the assembly voted by order through each of the Three Estates separately before casting one vote. Through this process, the Third Estate composed of commoners and the majority of the French populace was regularly outvoted by the two higher estates.

In September 1788, the Paris parlement issued an edict for the Estates General to adopt the 1614 form and procedure, which condemned members of the parlements as servants of aristocrats.

### **With the edict of the parlement, two slogans emerged:**

1. **Voting by head** which means votes by ballots of individual deputies.
2. **Doubling the Third** which demanded twofold increase in Third Estate representation.

As advised by Jacques Necker, Louis XVI recalled the Assembly of Notables in November 1788 to analyze the

issue of the Estates General. The Notables agreed with the ruling of the parlements and adopted the 1614 procedures. However, on December 27, the king sought a compromise by doubling the seats of deputies from the Third Estate. But such an act did not change the Third Estate's voting power.

### **Election of deputies**

Louis XVI issued another edict for the instructions of electing deputies to the Estates General on January 24, 1789. For the First and Second Estate, deputies were elected through an electoral assembly which was attended by all clergymen and nobles.

The election of deputies for the Third Estate was more complex. At the countryside level, male taxpayers over the age of 25 attended parish assemblies to elect representatives to bailliage assemblies. While in towns and cities, guilds sent representatives to the bailliage assembly, which was responsible for the election of deputies.

### **Composition of Estates General deputies**

Due to expensive travel to and stays in Versailles, where the Estates General convened, deputies needed to be wealthy. As a result of this limitation, deputies of the Third Estate were mostly representative of the bourgeoisie than the working class.

- No peasants or artisans were elected as deputies. About 80 of them were business owners, while half were practicing lawyers.
- About 208 of the 296 deputies of the First Estate were parish priests while the remaining number were bishops.

- About 70% of deputies from the Second Estate were serving or retired military officers. The remainder were aristocrats.



**Inauguration of the Estates General in Versailles by Louis XVI, June 1789**

## 2.4 The short-term causes: the key events of 1789 and their causes and consequences, including the Tennis Court Oath

With a long list of grievances, hopes of political reforms, and expectations of being outvoted, the Third Estate declared itself the National Assembly on June 17, and took an oath at a tennis court on June 20, 1789, to force King Louis XVI to create a new constitution.

*The National Assembly,*

*Considering that it has been called to establish the constitution of the realm, to bring about the regeneration of public order, and to maintain the true principles of monarchy; nothing may prevent it from continuing its deliberations in any place it is forced to establish itself; and, finally, the National Assembly exists wherever its members are gathered.*

*Decrees that all members of this Assembly immediately take a solemn oath never to separate, and to reassemble wherever circumstances require until the constitution of the realm is established and fixed upon solid foundations; and that said oath having been sworn, all members and each one individually confirms this unwavering resolution with his signature.*

*We swear never to separate ourselves from the National Assembly, and to reassemble wherever circumstances require until the constitution of the realm is drawn up and fixed upon solid foundations.*



**Depiction of the Tennis Court Oath**



By locking the hall, the Third Estate was excluded from the regular meeting. In response, they gathered in an indoor tennis court where they took an oath.

## 2.5 The short-term causes: the key events of 1789 and their causes and consequences, including the Storming of the Bastille



The Bastille was a military fortress built during the Hundred Years' War in the 1300s to protect the eastern entrance of Paris against the English.



**Depiction of the Storming of the Bastille**

The Bastille served as a prison for political dissidents, including writers and philosophers. Today, the violent storming of the Bastille on July 14, 1789, is commemorated every year to remember the tyranny of the French monarchs, Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette.

Following their demands to increase their voice in governance, members of the Third Estate worried that the French army would soon attack them. In hopes to arm themselves, Parisian revolutionaries took over the Hotel des Invalides in Paris where they seized muskets.

At that time, aside from being a prison, Bastille was a military fortress filled with gunpowder and munitions. On July 14, the revolutionaries demanded Governor de Launay of Bastille to surrender, abandon the gunpowder and free the prisoners. Launay initially refused.

In the process of negotiations, the crowd became aggressive, Bastille was surrounded, fighting began, and the French soldiers soon sided with the revolutionaries.

### **Following the Storming of the Bastille:**

- Political prisoners were freed
- Parisian revolutionaries seized gunpowder
- The governor and a few of his officers were beheaded

Generally, the event bolstered the political significance of the revolution. It demonstrated how the common French people wanted to end tyranny and feudalism.

As more Parisians converged on the Bastille, Launay raised a white flag. Along with a few of his officers, he was to

be taken to the Hotel de Ville and tried by a revolutionary council. However, he was pulled by a mob and killed.



Today, the site of the Bastille is a square called the Place de la Bastille with a monumental tower commemorating the event. Those who took part in the storming were titled as Vainqueurs de la Bastille.



**Image of the Place de la Bastille**

## 2.6 The short-term causes: the key events of 1789 and their causes and consequences, including the Grande Peur

Known as the Great Fear, a series of peasant riots occurred between July and August 1789 after rumors of brigands or outsiders rampaging in the countryside. Rumors of violence provoked various responses from the peasantry.

Many peasants responded to the rumors by:

- Arming themselves to defend their property from raids;
- Looting chateaus of aristocrats; and
- Neglecting or destroying feudal contracts;
- With such acts, the peasants became the brigands they had initially feared.

### **Why did the peasants respond that way?**

When France suffered a food crisis in the spring of 1789, many peasants developed paranoia towards arriving outsiders. Most outsiders who travelled in the middle of the year were landless laborers, beggars, and vagrants. Peasants in the countryside feared that they were **competitors for scarce labor, food, and charity**.

Moreover, peasant communities believed that the king hired brigands to suppress growing revolutionary sentiments in the countryside.



**Map showing the spread of violence during the Grande Peur**

During the *Grande Peur*, large groups of armed peasants searched for targets in villages. Targets were symbols of feudal authority, including contracts, obligations, land holdings, and private property. The *seigneurs* or landed aristocrats suffered worse.

In late July, riots in Dauphine, south-eastern France were considered the worst of the Great Fear. Peasants who formed gangs ransacked and burned many chateaux. Only those aristocrats who tried to resist were harmed. Some who refused to renounce their feudal rights were held for ransom.

In response, some nobles gathered and established their own militia to protect their citizens, similar to the act of Baron de Drouhet and Baron de Belinay of Limousin.

With unclear reasons behind the panic, scholars continued to research its cause. In the late 1980s, Mary Matossian theorized that the riotous peasants may have eaten ergot-contaminated wheat, which caused paranoid delusions.

## 2.7 The short-term causes: the key events of 1789 and their causes and consequences, including the setting of the National Assembly

Formally known as the National Constituent Assembly (Assemblée Nationale Constituante), the French National Assembly was formed on June 17, 1789, by delegates from the Third Estate as they split from the Estates General.

Angered by their unheard voice in the government, the Third Estate delegates met and took an oath in a nearby tennis court. With the principles of establishing a new constitution, they formed the National Assembly, a new revolutionary government that lasted until 1791.

*"not to separate, and to reassemble wherever circumstances require, until the constitution of the kingdom is established."*

*Pledged by delegates of the Third Estate during the Tennis Court Oath*

As resentment towards King Louis XVI spread, several delegates from the First and Second Estates joined the National Assembly. By July 9th, the National Assembly formed into the National Constituent Assembly and remained until replaced by the Legislative Assembly in 1791.

Following the storming of the Bastille, the National Assembly began to rule France. Forces of the Assembly, the conservatives (The Right), and the Monarchists (The Left) emerged.



The political labels of 'Rightist' and 'Leftist' originated during the French Revolution. It is based on the sitting position of the delegates.

## Timeline

1. Triggered by the riots created by the Great Fear, the National Assembly abolished feudalism on **August 4, 1789**. As a result, special feudal privileges of nobles and the clergy were lost.
2. On **August 26, 1789**, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen which comprised a statement of principles was published. At the same time, the Assembly granted Necker financial dictatorship.
3. In **September 1790**, the old judicial system was officially abolished.
4. On **November 2, 1789**, in order to address France's financial crisis, the property of the church became a property of the nation. The Assembly began to sell land to raise revenue.
5. In **July 1790**, the clergy became employees of the state under the Civil Constitution of the Clergy.

## Glossary of terms

**National Assembly** - Formally known as the National Constituent Assembly (Assemblée Nationale Constituante), the French National Assembly was formed in June 17, 1789 by delegates from the Third Estate as they split from the Estates General.

**Estates General** - *États Généraux* in French, the Estates General was a form of representative assembly similar to a congress or parliament. Members were representatives from all the Three Estates.

**Bastille** - The Bastille was a military fortress built during the Hundred Years' War in the 1300s to protect the eastern entrance of Paris from the English.

**Assembly of Notables** - The Assembly of Notables, as its name indicates, was a council composed of members from the First and Second Estates.

**Grande Peur** - Known as the Great Fear, a series of peasant riots occurred between July and August 1789 after rumors of brigands or outsiders rampaging the countryside. Rumors of violence provoked various responses from the peasantry.

**Parlement** - The French parlement was then composed of high courts which often rejected tax reforms as it would negatively affect them.

## Thinking Time

### Source A:

*"The only way to bring real order into the finances is to revitalize the entire state by reforming all that is defective in its constitution,"*

Charles Alexandre de Calonne to King Louis XVI

### Source B: Inauguration of the Estates General in Versailles by Auguste Couder, 1789



### Source C: Depiction of the Tennis Court Oath



**Source D: Depiction of the Storming of the Bastille**

How significant was social inequality as the primary cause of the French Revolution of 1789? Use 3 of the 4 sources provided, and your own knowledge.

## Chapter 3 - Developments 1789-92

### Important Keywords

**Constituent Assembly**

**Sans Culottes**

**Legislative Assembly**

**Girondins**

**coup**

**Jacobins**

**National Convention**

*... stronger than all the armies of Napoleon.*

*Lord Acton on the Declaration of the Rights of Man*

### Learning Standards:

#### **Change, Continuity, and Context**

D2.His.2.9-12. Analyze change and continuity in historical eras.

#### **Perspectives**

D2.His.5.9-12. Analyze how historical contexts shaped and continue to shape people's perspectives.

#### **Historical Sources and Evidence**

D2.His.10.9-12. Detect possible limitations in various kinds of historical evidence and differing secondary interpretations.

#### **Causation and Argumentation**

D2.His.15.9-12. Distinguish between long-term causes and triggering events in developing a historical argument.

## Learning Objectives:

### Learning Standard: Change, Continuity, and Context (D2.His.2.9-12)

**Objective:** Students will analyze the changes and continuities in French society and governance from 1789 to 1792, including the abolition of feudal privileges, the drafting of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, and the establishment of new political structures.

### Learning Standard: Perspectives (D2.His.5.9-12)

**Objective:** Students will analyze how the historical contexts of economic distress, social inequality, and Enlightenment ideas shaped the perspectives of various groups during the French Revolution, including the Third Estate, the aristocracy, and the monarchy, and how these perspectives evolved during this period.

### Learning Standard: Historical Sources and Evidence (D2.His.10.9-12)

**Objective:** Students will detect possible limitations in various types of historical evidence, such as government decrees, revolutionary pamphlets, and eyewitness accounts, and explore how differing secondary interpretations can arise from these sources.

### Learning Standard: Causation and Argumentation (D2.His.15.9-12)

**Objective:** Students will distinguish between long-term causes, such as structural inequalities and Enlightenment thought, and triggering events, such as the storming of the Bastille and the Flight to Varennes, in developing a well-supported historical argument about the developments during the French Revolution from 1789 to 1792.

## 3.1 Changes brought about by the Constituent Assembly (1789-91)

On July 9, 1789, the National Constituent Assembly, simply known as the Assembly, became the new governing body of France. Originally, delegates from the Third Estate comprised the assembly and were later on joined by representatives from the First and Second Estates, mostly composed of clergymen and nobles.

- Several special privileges among nobles were abolished, including hereditary titles of prince, baron, and duke.
- Under the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, the local people got to elect churchmen who were then paid by the state.
- Most church estates were sold to bidders. Some low-cost land was sold to peasants, while the majority was bought by wealthy people.
- New paper money called *assignats* was introduced. However, due to the continued financial crisis, it quickly lost its value.

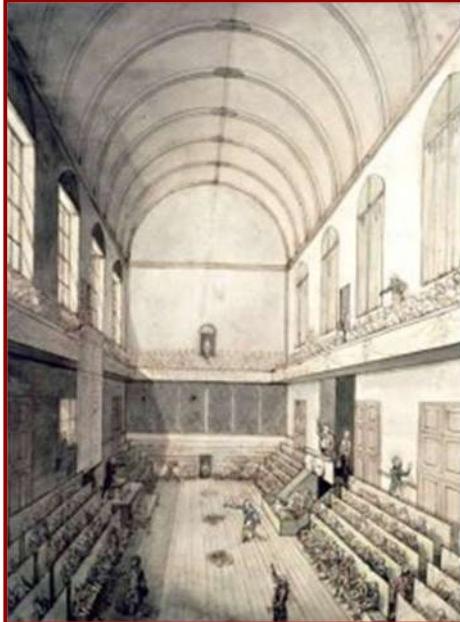


The most significant accomplishment of the Assembly was the abolition of feudalism, serfdom, and class privileges which were the reasons behind peasant attacks against the nobility.

On August 27, the National Assembly passed the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizens which became a written document of Rousseau's philosophy on natural rights - freedom and equality.

**The Declaration of the Rights of Man states that...**

*"the representatives of the French people, constituted as a National Assembly, believing that ignorance, forgetfulness or contempt of the rights of man are the only causes of public misfortunes and of the corruption of governments, have resolved to set forth in a solemn declaration, the natural, inalienable and sacred rights of man; in order that this declaration being constantly before all members of the social body may always recall to them their rights and their duties; in order that the acts of the legislative and executive powers being constantly capable of comparison with the objects of all political institutions may on that account be the most respected; in order that the demands of citizens being founded henceforth on simple and incontestable principles may be always directed to the maintenance of the constitution and the happiness of all."*



**Depiction of the Legislative Assembly meeting**



In September 1791, the Legislative Assembly replaced the National Constituent Assembly. It lasted until September 1792.

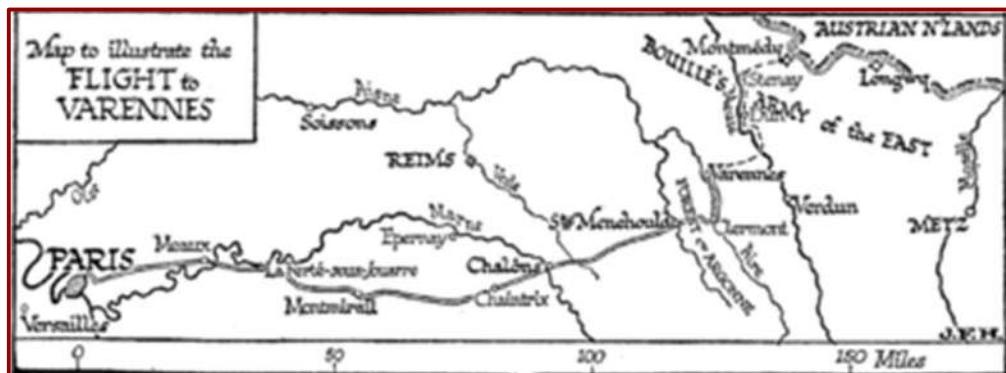
### 3.2 The flight to Varennes and its impact

In June 1791, the French royal family attempted to escape Paris, which became one of the turning points of the French Revolution. This failed attempt of King Louis XVI in response to growing radicalism became known as the Flight to Varennes.

## Reasons behind Louis XVI's escape

As per the advice of Honore Mirabeau, the king should relocate to Rouen to rally support from the people away from Paris.

After the passage of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, the king refused to attend any mass officiated by a constitutional priest as he was a highly devoted believer of the Vatican.



**Map showing the route of the French royal family's escape plan**

A personal favorite of Marie Antoinette, Axel von Fersen, a Swedish diplomat and military leader, planned the escape plan of the French royals. According to the plan, the French royals would use false passports and travel in disguise as they passed the road to Montmedy which was 200 miles away from Paris.

On June 20, 1791, the French royals proceeded with the plan but at least 90 minutes behind schedule due to the following:

- Extended visit from Marquis de Lafayette and Jean-sylvain Bailly;
- Marie Antoinette wandered for several minutes in the streets looking for her carriage;
- The king's carriage fell near Châlons.

While passing Châlons, the king's escape plan was exposed in Paris. In pursuit of the royal family, a contingent of the National Guard was sent out. As the news spread in the city, rumors of foreign invasion and assistance of Lafayette and Bailly spread and angered the people.

- As the royal entourage reached Sainte Menehould, a local postmaster named Jean-Baptiste Drouet recognized the king and raised the alarm.
- On June 21, the king was arrested at Varennes and dispatched back to Paris the following morning.

Their failed escape brought ridicule to the French royals which triggered propaganda against them. As a result, radical journalists in Paris insisted on the abolition of the monarchy and creation of a republic. They also insisted that the king should be tried of treason for breaking the constitution.

The initial idea of a peaceful transition to a constitutional monarchy collapsed.

### 3.3 The roles of the Sans Culottes, Girondins, and Jacobins

The **Sans Culottes** was one of the many groups that drove the French Revolution. They were generally members of the lower middle class, including apprentices, craftsmen, shopkeepers, and clerks. Given their numbers in Paris and provincial cities, the Sans Culottes were the strongest group in Paris. Willing to commit violence, they gathered a massive street army.

The Sans Culottes specifically aimed to achieve justice and equality. They demanded jobs and price fixing. Moreover, they were significant figures in implementing Terror, which condemned numerous aristocrats. However, their freeing goal of equality was immediately turned into a force of violence.

Most of them were responsible for the storming of the Bastille and murder of its governor. In October 1789, Sans Culottes women participated in the march on Versailles which demanded the return of the royal family to Paris.

Sans Culottes in Paris took over the Tuileries palace in August 1792. On the same day, they also coerced the Legislative Assembly to suspend the monarchy.



The term Sans Culottes literally means ‘without.’ A culottes was a form of high knee clothing worn by members of the wealthy class.



Illustration of Sans Culottes

In September 1792, they raided a number of prisons in Paris and murdered counter-revolutionaries. Aside from their clothing and violent acts, historians characterized members of the San Culottes as class warriors and the backbone of the revolution.

Also called Brissotin, the **Girondins** was a group of republican politicians from the department of the Gironde of the Legislative Assembly. They were initially composed of lawyers, journalists, and intellectuals, later joined by merchants and industrialists.

The Girondins were known believers of economic liberalism and social equality. Along with the Jacobins, the Girondins were prominent in the Legislative Assembly. They favored the declaration of war against Austria which resulted in French defeat. Moreover, they pushed for the punishment of people responsible for the September

massacre which also failed. All the more, their dominant position in the Assembly totally collapsed when many of them disagreed on the execution of Louis XVI in 1793. The Girondins' monopoly of power soon diminished with influential leaders joining the Jacobins.



Both Girondins and Jacobins fought in the French Revolution. Amidst their radical ideologies, the Girondins were labelled conservatives, while the Jacobins were called republicans.

The Jacobins were radical revolutionaries who plotted the execution of King Louis XVI and establishment of the French Republic. They were known as the initiators of Terror during the French Revolution. The Jacobins believed that all powers and rights resided with the people. In contrast to absolute monarchy, Jacobins proposed that the people were the true supervisors of their leaders.

Members of the Jacobins included delegates from the elite class, artisans, and tradesmen. Among them was leader, Maximilien Robespierre who infamously led the Reign of Terror.

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*“every citizen has the right to cooperate in legislation, and hence to be elector or eligible, without distinction of fortune.” - Robespierre,*

1791

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In 1792, the Jacobins stormed the Tuileries palace and seized the French royal family. In September of the same year, they led the abolition of monarchy and declaration of France as a Republic.

The Reign of Terror in 1793 was characterized by intense violence involving the execution of counter-revolutionaries through guillotine. Thousands of them were killed without trial or died in jail. Members of the Jacobins lived with the motto “Live free or die.”



Formally known as the Society of the Friends of the Constitution, the Jacobin Club was established in August 1789 and identified with the ideas of egalitarianism.

### 3.4 The Legislative Assembly (1791-92)

In October 1791, the Legislative Assembly replaced the National Constituent Assembly of France. Its members were elected a month before which included deputies who had records in public service either at provincial or municipal level. Many were new delegates were members of the Jacobin Club.

#### **Power of King Louis XVI over the Assembly**

- ✓ Appointment of ministers
- ✓ Power of suspensive veto

Given his power, the Legislative Assembly faced challenges and problems. The king appointed ministers based on his alliances and not on merit. Moreover, he used his veto power to block legislation. As a result of numerous royal vetoes, public protests against the monarch became uncontrollable.

There were about 330 republican deputies, 165 constitutional monarchists, and 250 politically nonaligned delegates.



Jacques Brissot, leader of the Girondins once dominated the Legislative Assembly. The Girondins pushed for the declaration of war against Austria in 1792.

The Assembly also failed to solve the French economic crisis. With an ineffective constitutional monarchy, the Legislative Assembly struggled to pass reforms. Moreover, their involvement in external war worsened their financial status.

### 3.5 The declaration of war on Austria and Prussia and its impact

On April 20, 1792, highly influenced by the Girondins, the Legislative Assembly declared war against Austria. After few weeks, Prussia joined Austria against France.

#### **Reasons behind the preemptive declaration of war**

With foreign European monarchs in observance, France felt threatened by possible foreign invasion on behalf of King Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette (sister of Leopold II, the Holy Roman Emperor).

The Girondins aimed to spread the spirit of revolution throughout Europe to strengthen their own revolution.

King Louis XVI hoped that by engaging in war, he'd gain personal popularity.

In August 1791, the Padua Circular was followed by the joint Declaration of Pillnitz between Leopold II and

Frederick William II of Prussia. Such an act did not shake the revolution in France.



In July 1791, newly crowned Leopold II instigated the Padua Circular addressed to ruling monarchs of Prussia, England, Spain, Russia, and Sweden, which stated the need for military coalition to invade France and reinstall the monarchy.



**Painting showing the French victory at the Battle at Valmy**

Initially, the war against Austria and Prussia turned into a disaster. The French armed forces had poor discipline. As a result, insubordination became a common problem in the ranks of the army. Many abandoned the

military, while others remained due to harsh punishments for leaving.

France's declaration of war against Austria and Prussia ignited a series of wars participated in by France against other European powers.



Known as an enlightened prince, Leopold II initially supported the French Revolution and had no real plans of invading France.

The Prussian defeat at Valmy in September 1792 led to territorial expansion of revolutionary France. In response, Britain sent its own army to Flanders in 1793, along with the Austrian and Dutch army, the War of the First Coalition began.



Image of Leopold in 1770



Map showing the great European powers in 1792

### 3.6 The reasons for the coup of August 1792

Three years after the attack on the Bastille, the Tuileries Palace, the official residence of King Louis XVI and meeting place of the Legislative Assembly was attacked on August 10, 1792.

Since the Parisian marched on Versailles in October 1789, Louis XVI and his family resided at the Tuileries Palace.



The Tuileries Palace was located on the right bank of the Seine and was not used as a royal residence since Louis XIV.

Louis XVI lived at the Tuileries under house arrest. His royal court continued to operate both in Tuileries and Versailles for the sake of upholding national prestige, but with less grandeur.

### Timeline

1. On **February 28, 1791**, about 400 nobles took arms to protect the king after hearing rumors of assassination by the Sans Culottes. The stand-off between the two groups was halted by the interference of Lafayette.
2. In **April 1791**, another working-class mob blocked the gates of the Tuileries which prevented the royal family from going to Saint-Cloud.
3. In **November 1791**, Louis XVI further angered the people when he vetoed the Legislative Assembly's decrees on non-jurying priests.
4. Condemning Louis XVI's veto, an armed crowd attacked the Tuileries in **June 1792**.
5. **July 1792**, a war manifesto was issued by the Duke of Brunswick threatening the people to protect the royal family.
6. In early **August 1792**, rumors spread of an Austrian and Prussian attack to rescue the French royal family. Others thought about the king's plan to escape to Rouen.

7. On **August 9, 1792**, several delegates took control of the Paris Commune. Leaders such as orator Georges Danton and Jacobin Maximilien Robespierre led the crowd. The Paris Commune was replaced by the Insurrectionary Commune.
8. On **August 10, 1792**, coalition of soldiers from the National Guards of Brittany and Marseille, plus Sans Culottes marched to the Tuileries.



**Illustration depicting the encounter of Swiss Guards and republican Guardsmen at Tuileries**

On August 10, thousands of armed people arrived at the Tuileries. Louis XVI took refuge in the Legislative Assembly chamber and ordered the Swiss Guard to defend the palace. About two-thirds of the Swiss Guards were massacred by Sans Culottes. Aside from the guards, palace staff and courtiers were also killed. After a month, survivors were killed during the September massacres.

### **Reasons behind the coup**

The failure of the initial battle against Austria and Prussia was blamed on the king, his ministers, and the Girondins.

- Louis XVI's formation of a new cabinet composed of constitutional monarchists.
- King's veto of several decrees of the Legislative Assembly.
- Austrian and Prussian armies arrival in France.



**Illustration showing the Tuileries Palace at the time of the coup**

### 3.7 The setting up of the National Convention

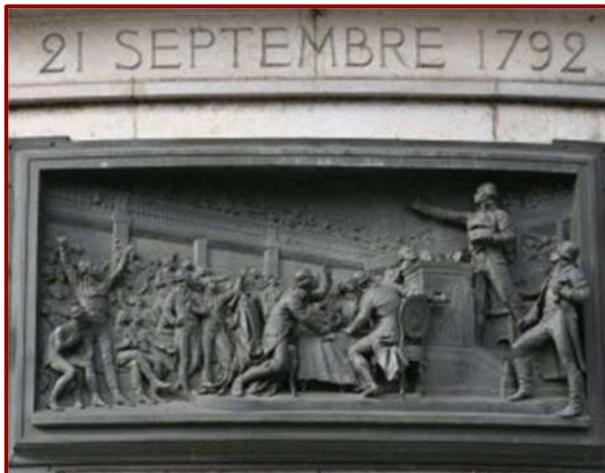
On September 20, 1792, the National Convention which replaced the Legislative Assembly was formed. It was a single-chamber assembly, which in the process fractured into factions - the Jacobin Club, whose members aspired to establish a democratic republic.

The Convention was formed after the storming of the Tuileries and suspension of the monarchy. The Legislative Assembly took over governance and functioned as the head of state. They gained public support by replacing the ministers with more popular figures close to the people.

Amidst the reforms provided by the Assembly, divided deputies led to the demise of the chamber.

In August 1792, the Assembly concluded that Frenchmen aged 21 and above, and a resident for a year with a decent job had the right to vote in the national elections for a new legislature. The right to suffrage was not universal, it was denied to servants and women.

In the first week of September 1792, the elections for the new National Convention were conducted. About 749 deputies with varied political affiliations were elected to the Convention.



**Plaque depicting the declaration of the French Republic by the National Convention**

## Glossary of terms

**Constituent Assembly** - The National Constituent

Assembly, simply known as the Assembly became the new governing body of France in 1789.

**Sans Culottes** - The Sans Culottes was one of the many groups that drove the French Revolution. They were generally members of the lower middle-class, including apprentices, craftsmen, shopkeepers, and clerks.

**Girondins** - Also called Brissotin, the Girondins was a group of republican politicians from the department of the Gironde of the Legislative Assembly. They were initially composed of lawyers, journalists, and intellectuals, later joined by merchants and industrialists.

**Jacobins** - The Jacobins were radical revolutionaries who plotted the execution of King Louis XVI and establishment of the French Republic. They were known as the initiator of Terror during the French Revolution.

**Legislative Assembly** - In September 1791, the Legislative Assembly replaced the National Constituent Assembly which lasted until September 1792.

**National Convention** - The National Convention which replaced the Legislative Assembly in 1792 was a single-chamber assembly, which in the process fractured into factions.

## Thinking Time

## **Source A:**



## **Source B: Historian William Doyle**

"The flight to Varennes opened up the second great schism of the revolution. There had been hardly any republicanism in 1789, and what there was had abated once the king was back in Paris and accepting all the Assembly sent to him. But after Varennes, the mistrust built up by his long record of apparent ambivalence burst out into widespread demands from the populace of the capital and a number of radical publicists for the king to be dethroned."

**Source C:** With the benefit of hindsight, Engels wrote in a letter to Marx in 1870 that:

These perpetual little panics of the French — which all arise from fear of the moment when they will really have to learn the truth — give one a much better idea of the Reign of Terror. We think of this as the reign of people who inspire

terror; on the contrary, it is the reign of people who are themselves terrified.

**Option 1:** To what extent did the fear of foreign intervention influence the French Revolution between 1792 and 1794? [This does not require sources but must be supported with examples.]

**Option 2:** Examine the social and economic effects of the French Revolution in France. Use 2 of the provided sources.

# Chapter 4 - Convention and Terror, 1792-94

## Important Keywords

**Edict of Fraternity**

**Guillotine**

**Committee of Public Safety (CPS)**

**Girondins**

**Jacobins**

**Reign of Terror**

*I forgive my enemies. I trust that my death will be for the happiness of my people, but I grieve for France and I fear she may suffer the anger of the Lord.*

*Louis XVI's last words based on a letter from a royalist named Bernard to his mother describing the King's execution*

## Learning Standards:

### **Change, Continuity, and Context**

D2.His.2.9-12. Analyze change and continuity in historical eras.

### **Perspectives**

D2.His.6.9-12. Analyze the ways in which the perspectives of those writing history shaped the history that they produced.

### **Historical Sources and Evidence**

D2.His.10.9-12. Detect possible limitations in various kinds of historical evidence and differing secondary interpretations.

### **Causation and Argumentation**

D2.His.16.9-12. Integrate evidence from multiple relevant historical sources and interpretations into a reasoned argument about the past.

## Learning Objectives:

### **Learning Standard: Change, Continuity, and Context (D2.His.2.9-12)**

**Objective:** Students will analyze the changes and continuities during the period of the National Convention and the Reign of Terror, focusing on shifts in governance, the role of radical political ideologies, and the societal impacts of policies like the Law of Suspects and the Cult of the Supreme Being.

### **Learning Standard: Perspectives (D2.His.6.9-12)**

**Objective:** Students will analyze how the perspectives of those who wrote about the Reign of Terror, such as revolutionary leaders, foreign observers, and later historians, shaped the historical narrative of this period and influenced how it has been understood over time.

### **Learning Standard: Historical Sources and Evidence**

#### **(D2.His.10.9-12)**

**Objective:** Students will detect possible limitations in different types of historical evidence from the Convention and Terror period, including government decrees, speeches, and propaganda, and explore how these limitations can lead to differing secondary interpretations.

**Learning Standard: Causation and Argumentation  
(D2.His.16.9-12)**

**Objective:** Students will integrate evidence from multiple relevant historical sources and interpretations to construct a reasoned argument about the causes and effects of the Reign of Terror, considering factors such as internal political strife, external threats, and economic pressures.

## 4.1 The National Convention

### Factions in the National Convention

- MONTAGNARDS
- GIRONDINS

Following the attack at Tuileries and suspension of the monarch, an election was held forming the National Convention in 1792. A total of 749 deputies of different political affiliations were elected by around a million able Frenchmen over 21. At the second session, the Convention's deputies passed the abolition of the monarchy and turned France into a republic.

As months passed by, the Convention was divided into factions. The Montagnards who occupied the upper seats, to the left of the president were known radical democrats. Opposite to them were the Girondins characterized as moderate republicans led by Jacques Brissot. Initially, most proceedings were dominated by the Girondins as they were manned with orators and lawmakers.

## Issues of the National Convention

- Fate of deposed king Louis XVI**
- State of French economy**
- Development of the revolutionary war**
- Destabilization of radicals in Paris**

### 4.2 The Edict of Fraternity

On November 19, 1792, the National Convention issued the Edict of Fraternity which stated that the French were friends of the people, while all governments were their enemies. The Edict persuaded European people to rise against their respective monarchies and seek freedom to govern. It also promised material and moral support to those who would lead the uprisings.

The French wanted to spread republicanism as a form of government replacing absolute monarchy. Through the revolutionary ideas of ***liberty, equality, and fraternity*** they believed the ills common to societies governed by monarchs could be erased.

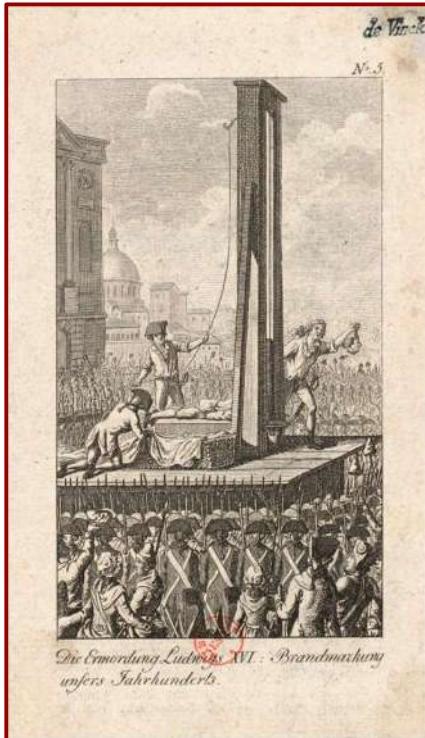
As a result, most monarchical governments in Europe feared that the French revolutionary causes would spread and dethrone them. This fear destroyed the possible co-existence of France with the rest of Europe.

With the possible dangers of the Edict of Fraternity, plus the French expansion of its natural frontiers, the British condemned the French plans due to the potential threat to its trade and security.



The term ‘Fraternity’ means brotherhood or help to “all peoples who wish to recover their liberty.”

### 4.3 The trial and execution of Louis XVI



**Image showing the execution of deposed King Louis XVI**

Deposed king Louis XVI was formally placed on trial by the National Convention in December 1792. Louis XVI was read with 33 charges which described acts of betrayal and failure of leadership. After gaining 693 votes from the

National Convention, the king was found guilty and sentenced to execution without any right to an appeal.

Even prior to the trial, King Louis XVI's fate was already decided after the August 10 storming of the Tuileries, when the royal family took refuge in the chamber of the Legislative Assembly, while the crowd was demanding for the abolition of the monarchy.

With public demand, the Legislative Assembly ordered the suspension and arrest of Louis XVI. He and his family were stripped of royal and noble titles and rights amidst the existing Constitution of 1791.

Initially, the National Convention spent almost a month debating on whether “*Louis XVI ‘judgeable’ for the crimes he is imputed to have committed on the constitutional throne?*”

## THE TRIAL

After presentation of arguments, the National Convention agreed that Louis XVI should be put on trial in December. After a week, the former king gathered the best French lawyers, including Raymond de Sèze, Francois Tronchet, and Guillaume Malesherbes to defend him.

## **Louis XVI's Defense**

Under the former king's instruction, his lawyers questioned the legality of the trial under the existing constitution.

The defense refuted the claims that the king was to blame for foreign aggression, military failures, and storming at the Tuileries.

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*"You want to pronounce on the fate of Louis,  
yet it is you yourselves who accuse him! You  
want to pronounce on the fate of Louis, yet you  
have already declared your views! You want to  
pronounce on the fate of Louis, yet your  
opinions are already spread across Europe!"  
Opening statement of De Sèze to the National  
Convention*

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After short a deliberation of the arguments, the National Convention voted and handed down a guilty verdict on January 15, 1793. Along with the crowd, mostly Parisian sections, and the Jacobins inside the Convention, they called for the king's execution. On January 17, with 424 votes against 283, the Jacobins and the Plains defeated the motion of an *appel au peuple*, while 387 to 334 votes favored Louis XVI's execution.

## **THE EXECUTION**

On January 20, the king's death warrant was finalized by the Convention. The order also stated that his execution should be done within 24 hours. In response, Louis XVI appealed for three days to bid farewell to his family. On the evening of January 20, he was allowed to visit Marie Antoinette and their children, but the other request was rejected.

The next day, a non-jurying priest officiated a mass. He rode a carriage traversing the streets to Paris. By 10 o'clock in the morning, he arrived at the former Place de Louis XV. An estimated 100,000 people gathered in the square to witness the king's execution.

The executioner tied Louis XVI's hands and then cut his hair. His body and head were taken to the parish cemetery and thrown into a pit.

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*'I forgive my enemies. I trust that my death will be for the happiness of my people, but I grieve for France and I fear she may suffer the anger of the Lord.'*

*Louis XVI's last words based on a letter from a royalist named Bernard to his mother describing the King's execution*

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In London, the French king's execution was seen as a descent into anarchy and act of regicide. They expelled the French ambassador, four days after Louis' death. In response, France declared war against England. In Russia, Catherine the Great broke relations with France, while Austria and Prussia heightened its war against them.

#### 4.4 The work of the Committee of Public Safety

Between September 1793 and July 1794, the Committee of Public Safety ruled over France during the Reign of Terror. On April 6, 1793, this political body was formed while France was under the threat of foreign and civil war.

Ideally, the committee was formed to secure the nation's defense against foreign and domestic enemies. Moreover, it was designed to oversee the ruling of the executive government. Members were elected by the

National Convention. By July, after the failure of the first set of committees, radical delegates replaced them, including Maximilien Robespierre.

**The Committee of Public Safety was able to dominate the national Convention through the support of the Jacobins. They implemented the following:**

- ✓ Counter-revolutionaries were hunted down
- ✓ France turned into a war economy
- ✓ Mass conscription was imposed

Despite the limitations provided, the Committee was dominated by radicals which resulted in dictatorship of the National Convention, instead of acting on its behalf. The CPS held secrecy and autonomy.



Initially the Committee contained 9 seats, later extended to 10, then 12 which were replaced every month to prevent individuals from gaining excessive power.

In September 1793, the National Convention granted the CPS with additional responsibilities and powers which led to its accumulation of power and later dictatorship.

The CPS gained authority to appoint deputies to other existing committees.

The Law of Suspects and the Law of Maximum passed by the convention gave the CPS a more active role in the government, national security, and policies on war.

On December 4, 1793, the National convention passed the Law of 14 Frimaire which formalized the political

power of the CPS. The law was later dubbed as the 'Constitution of the Terror.'



**Illustration depicting the Committee of Public Safety**



Marie Antoinette and Jacques Brissot were among the victims of guillotine under the dictatorship of the CPS.

## 4.5 The elimination of the Girondins

### Reasons behind the fall of the Girondins

Unlike the Montagnards who supported the execution of Louis XVI, the Girondins believed that the penalty of death should be endorsed by the people. In addition to losing in the Convention's vote, Parisian radicals labelled them royalist sympathizers.

In December 1792, Girondin deputies lobbied for an ‘appeal to the people’ on whether the former king should be executed.

In addition to conflict against the radicals of Paris, the Girondins’ investigation of the Paris Commune, and the arrest and murder of Jean-Paul Marat decreased their popularity.

The Montagnards sought the support of the Sans Culottes which finally resulted in the expulsion of Girondin deputies from the national Convention on June 2, 1793. As a result, the radicals gained full control of the Convention.

The Girondins failed to effectively respond to the economic crisis in Paris. On the other hand, the Jacobins and their allies were able to establish a dictatorship.

## 4.6 The role of Robespierre

Born in 1758, and like his father, Maximilien Robespierre was educated in Paris as a lawyer. In 1789, he was elected a deputy of the Estates General, as well as in the National Constituent Assembly. By April 1790, Robespierre consolidated power after being elected as president of the Jacobin Club.

After the fall of the monarchy in August 1792, he became the first deputy to the National Convention. It was the same Convention that abolished the monarchy, declared the French republic, and put the former king on trial and executed.



**Image of Maximilien Robespierre**

Power struggles between the Jacobins and Girondins escalated after the king's execution. Led by Robespierre, the Jacobins were able to exclude the Girondins and dominate the Convention and later the Committee of Public Safety.

As an influential member of the CPS, Robespierre orchestrated the 'Reign of Terror', which eliminated counter-revolutionaries. Also initiated by him, the cult of the Supreme Being, a new official religion, was introduced to France. For 11 months, about 300,000 alleged enemies were arrested, while an estimated 17,000 were executed, predominantly by guillotine.

#### **4.7 The reason for and impact of the Terror**

When the Jacobins led by Robespierre took dominant control of the National Convention and the CPS in June 1793, administrative and political purges were called. The Jacobins supported by the Sans Culottes were radicals who

saw violence as a way of insisting their political goals and rights.

### **Reasons for the Reign of Terror**

As the Jacobins dominated the Convention, they feared counter-revolutionaries, especially the Girondins whom they labelled as royalists sympathizers would overturn the cause of the revolution.

Passage of the Law of Suspects which legalized political terror and targeted royalists for treason.

In addition to the Girondins, the Jacobins were alarmed by the threat posed by foreign armies, especially on the French frontiers.

### **Impact the Reign of Terror**

Violence and terror became an official and legal government policy. Amidst keeping records of death sentences, many were executed without being tried in court. Thousands of condemned counter-revolutionaries were put to death by guillotine. Some were beaten to death by mobs.

#### **Deaths in percentage**

**Nobility - 8%**

**Clergy - 6%**

**Middle Class - 14%**

**Peasants - 72%**

Under the implementation of the Law of Suspects, the prison population increased to 4,525 people from 1,417 within three months.

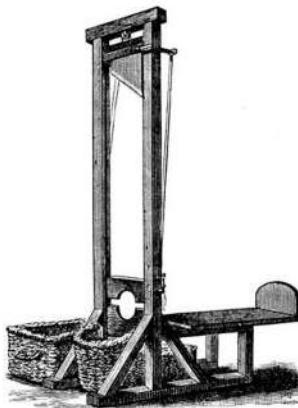


Prior to its introduction to France, the guillotine was used in Scotland and England to execute aristocrats.

As a direct effect of political instability, France, especially Paris suffered inflation, unemployment, and starvation as industries were damaged.



Introduced to France in 1792, the guillotine was a capital punishment by decapitation using a crossbeam and an oblique-edged knife which sliced through the neck on a person.



**Image of a guillotine used during the French Revolution**

## **Impact the Reign of Terror**

In 1793, fearing the spread of revolutionary ideas, nations like Britain and Russia formed a coalition against France. Moreover, in order to safeguard their rule, many European monarchs became despotic.

- The Reign of Terror led to the deaths of many senior military officials which opened up political space for young Napoleon Bonaparte.
- The fear of death by guillotine led many nobles and clerics to flee to the neighboring nations of Austria and Prussia, where they became *émigrés* or engaged in self-exile.
- In 1795, the Directory Government was formed to resolve the social, economic, and political damage caused by the Reign of Terror.

This period in French history marked the end of the Bourbon dynasty and the beginning of republicanism.

## Glossary of terms

**Edict of Fraternity** - The Edict persuaded European people to rise against their respective monarchies and seek freedom to govern. It also promised material and moral support to those who would lead the uprisings.

**Committee of Public Safety** - A committee formed to secure the nation's defense against foreign and domestic enemies during the Reign of Terror.

**Jacobins** - The Jacobins were radical revolutionaries who plotted the execution of King Louis XVI and establishment of the French Republic. They were known as the initiators of Terror during the French Revolution.

**Guillotine** - A capital punishment by decapitation using a crossbeam and an oblique-edged knife which sliced through the neck on a person.

**Reign of Terror** - Known as *La Terreur* in French, the Reign of Terror was a period of the French Revolution characterized by execution of political enemies and domination of the Jacobins, particularly Robespierre.

**Girondins** - Also called Brissotin, the Girondins was a group of republican politicians from the department of the Gironde of the Legislative Assembly. They were initially composed of lawyers, journalists, and intellectuals, later joined by merchants and industrialists.

## Thinking Time

### Source A: Historian Paul R. Hanson

“Controversy over the Committee of Public Safety and its place in the history of the revolution began even before it disappeared. It is credited, on the one hand, for overseeing the defense of the country and guiding France to victory in war over almost all the other nations in Europe. But on the other hand, it is condemned for overseeing the machinery of the Terror and putting in place what has often been characterized as a Jacobin dictatorship. Whether the former required the latter lies at the heart of the debate.”

What does the source suggest is one success and one failure of the Committee of Public Safety?

# Chapter 5 - Directory and First Consul - the fall of Robespierre to the rise of Napoleon, 1794-99

## Important Keywords

**White Terror**

**Thermidorian Reaction**

**Directory**

**Royalist**

**First Consul**

**Council of the Ancients**

**Council of 500**

**Coup d'etat**

*We do not need Cromwell!*

*Written slogan of French deputies as Napoleon delivered his speech upon returning from Egypt*

## Learning Standards:

### **Change, Continuity, and Context**

D2.His.2.9-12. Analyze change and continuity in historical eras.

### **Perspectives**

D2.His.7.9-12. Explain how the perspectives of people in the present shape interpretations of the past.

### **Historical Sources and Evidence**

D2.His.11.9-12. Critique the usefulness of historical sources for a specific historical inquiry based on their maker, date, place of origin, intended audience, and purpose.

## **Causation and Argumentation**

D2.His.16.9-12. Integrate evidence from multiple relevant historical sources and interpretations into a reasoned argument about the past.

### **Learning Objectives:**

#### **Learning Standard: Change, Continuity, and Context (D2.His.2.9-12)**

**Objective:** Students will analyze the changes and continuities in French governance and society from the fall of Robespierre to the rise of Napoleon, examining how the Directory's policies and the political instability of this period set the stage for Napoleon's ascent.

#### **Learning Standard: Perspectives (D2.His.7.9-12)**

**Objective:** Students will explain how present-day perspectives shape interpretations of the Directory period and Napoleon's rise, considering how contemporary values and ideologies influence historical narratives about this transformative era.

#### **Learning Standard: Historical Sources and Evidence (D2.His.11.9-12)**

**Objective:** Students will critique the usefulness of historical sources related to the Directory and the rise of Napoleon, evaluating these sources based on their origin, the context in which they were created, their intended audience, and their purpose, to determine their reliability and perspective.

**Learning Standard: Causation and Argumentation****(D2.His.16.9-12)**

**Objective:** Students will integrate evidence from multiple historical sources and interpretations to develop a reasoned argument about the factors leading to the fall of the Directory and the rise of Napoleon, including political, economic, and social influences.

## 5.1 Reasons for Robespierre's downfall and execution

Maximilien Robespierre was the leader of the Jacobins who consolidated power and became dictator of the Committee of Public Safety, thus, took control of the National Convention during the Reign of Terror.

### Factors which led to the downfall of Robespierre

His unpopularity began when he initiated the unfair trial and execution of fellow politicians and close friends, Danton and Desmoulins on March 30, 1794. This incident created suspicion among the members of the Convention.

- Ineffective economic policies, such as the Maximum or price-fixing scheme, resulted in food shortages. As a result, rationing was implemented.
- Conflict over power in the Committee of Public Safety, specifically the moderates who disagreed with the revolutionary government.
- Robespierre claimed to have a list containing traitors and when asked by the Convention, he refused to answer. In order to save themselves, they had Robespierre executed first.

## 5.2 The Thermidorian Reaction and the White Terror

In July 1794, a coup composed of liberal-conservative counter-revolutionaries emerged against the leaders of the Jacobin club. It became known as the Thermidorian Reaction based on the month Thermidor of the revolutionary Calendar (July 19 - August 17) of the year II (1794).

Following the assassination of Jean-Paul Marat and executions of Danton and Desmoulins, Robespierre became a subject of conspiracies. On July 7 (Thermidor 9), the Montagnard conspiracy initiated the arrest of Robespierre. The next day, July 28, 1794 (Thermidor 10), Robespierre and 21 of his associates were executed.

The Thermidorian reactionaries wanted to create a conservative republic, free from terror, practice of religion, economic control, and centralized power.

Immediately, the Thermidorian Convention repealed laws stating Terror, thus, dissolving the Committee of Public Safety. Moreover, they initiated a '**White Terror**' which purged members of the Jacobins.



The Thermidorian reaction also refers to the time when the Directory superseded the National Convention.

By August 1795, the National Convention was dissolved and replaced with the Directory by November.

## 5.3 The setting up of the Directory, its limitations and achievements

Following the end of the National Convention, the French Directory was formed under the Constitution of 1795. It lasted until November 1799 with the emergence of Napoleon Bonaparte.

### The setting up of the Directory, its limitations and achievements



#### Structure of the Directory



The **Directory** was composed of 5 directors (at least 40 years old) who exercised executive power and appointed by the Legislature.



#### Council of Ancients

Composed of 250 members (at least 40 years old) who voted laws and were selected from 750 electors



#### Council of 500

Large property owners (at least 30 years old) who proposed laws



The Directory was created to abolish dictatorship during the Reign of Terror, but later gave way to another dictatorship led by Napoleon Bonaparte.



Over the years of the French Revolution, the Directory was the last among the four revolutionary governments: National Assembly, Legislative Assembly, and the National Convention.

LIMITATIONS	ACHIEVEMENTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- A director should be a former deputy or minister;</li><li>- Each year and on rotation, a director was chosen;</li><li>- Directors had the right to appoint ministers, ambassadors, tax collectors, and army generals, but had no funds for personal projects;</li><li>- The universal male suffrage was replaced by limited suffrage based on property;</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Creation of the <i>grandes écoles</i>, a system of elite centralized schools;</li><li>- Success of the French conquest during the Napoleonic period;</li><li>- Economic recovery;</li><li>- Establishment of a bicameral legislature, ideally for check and balance;</li></ul>



The first elected members of the Directory included Paul Francois Jean Nicolas, Louis Maries de La Revelliere-LePeaux, Jean-Francois Rewbell, Etienne-François Le Tourneur, and Lazare Nicolas Marguerite Carnot.

## 5.4 The royalist challenge and the coup of 18 Fructidor

With the growth of royalist representation in the Directory, a coup of 18 Fructidor year V (September 4, 1797) broke out in Paris. The anti-Jacobin movement became popular in Marseille and Lyon. Led by three directors and several royalist deputies were arrested for organizing and supporting a coup.

Charles Pichegru, a sympathizer of the monarchy was elected President of the Council of Five Hundred. His position and the election of royalist candidates in both Councils posed a threat to the control of the Directory. In support of the coup, General Lazare Hoche sent his troops in Paris, while Napoleon Bonaparte counteracts the coup with his own army under General Augereau.

Napoleon's army arrested them. Many were sent into exile to French Guiana. Moreover, 42 opposition newspapers were seized. Royalist members of both chambers were killed, and the elections were cancelled. The Directory revived military tribunals to monitor the *émigrés* and their attempts to return to France. Similar to the deputies, non-jurying priests were persecuted.



**Illustration depicting the Coup of 18 Fructidor at the Tuileries Palace**

## 5.5 The reasons for the fall of the Directory

When Napoleon returned from his expedition in Egypt, the French people revered him as a hero. He made an alliance with a number of influential politicians to overthrow the Directory through a coup d'état on November 9, 1799, also known as the Coup of 18th Brumaire, based on the revolutionary calendar.

### **Factors for the fall of the Directory**

With ongoing war with Austria, and military campaigns of Napoleon in Egypt and Syria, the French economy suffered. The Directory was left with only Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès, after the ousting of the Jacobins by the Coup of 30 Prairial.

Other than Carnot, all Directors were corrupt and greedy, focusing on personal gains rather than the national interest of France.

With the inefficiency of the Directory, the French people got tired of revolution. Instead of fighting in the streets again, they fixed their sights on Napoleon whom they expected to solve both the domestic and foreign problems of France.

Instead of addressing the problems of the French people, the Directory focused on maintaining its structure and power.

## 5.6 Napoleon Bonaparte named “First Consul”

Between 1804 and 1814, Napoleon Bonaparte or Napoleon I served as the emperor of France, and again in 1815. He was a skilled military and political leader who gained prominence during the French Revolution and the Revolutionary Wars.



**Image of Napoleon Bonaparte riding a horse**

Bonaparte's first stint in the military was in 1789 during the outbreak of the revolution. A Corsican nationalist, Bonaparte supported the Jacobin movement. In 1792, he was promoted to captain. At the age of 24, he was promoted to brigadier general and was put in charge of the French artillery in Italy by the Committee of Public Safety. Amidst his close relations with Robespierre, who was then lined up for execution, Bonaparte was released from prison and tasked to draw up plans for France against Austria.

Bonaparte gained enormous fame from the directory and the rest of France when he subdued the royalist coup of 18 Fructidor. He was promoted to Commander of the Interior and took command of the French army in Italy.

In his campaigns, Napoleon successfully invaded Italy and defeated the Austrian army. After his failed conquest of Egypt, Napoleon returned to France, still a hero. He initiated a coup within a coup, Sieyès initially planned with him.

### **Coup of 18 Brumaire**

Returning a hero, Napoleon plotted a coup within a coup. Knowledgeable about Napoleon's plan, Director Sieyès trusted the general. The original plan was to persuade the Directors to resign, while the Councils of Ancients and Five Hundred will appoint a commission to draw a new constitution. The plan succeeded and on the morning of 18 Brumaire, 3 out of 5 Directors resigned, thus abolishing the Directory due to lack of quorum.

The next day, Napoleon stormed into the legislative chambers and used his military power to put the deputies under pressure. Initially, the deputies resisted, but were forced to succumb to Napoleon's demands.

With the fall of the Directory, the plotters convened two commissions, both with 25 deputies from the Councils. The commissions then declared a provisional government with Napoleon, Sieyès, and Ducos as Consuls. Immediately, Sieyès influenced the commissions to draw up a new constitution. After two months, new consuls replaced Sieyès and Ducos, until Napoleon consolidated his own authority as the First Consul outpowering the other consuls and Councils.



**Painting depicting Napoleon at the legislative chamber during the Coup of 18 Brumaire**

## 5.7 Achievements of the revolution in France (1789-99)

The French Revolution lasted for ten chaotic years (between 1789 and 1799) and altered not only Europe's course, but world history in general.

- Feudalism was abolished.** Peasants acquired land and property that used to be under possession of nobles and clergy only.
- Monarchy as a form of government was dissolved.** From absolute monarchy, the revolution introduced the constitution, and then the republic which triggered weakening of other monarchical governments in Europe.
- It spread the spirit of liberalism in Europe and ignited an age of revolutions.** By the turn of the century, one by one, absolute monarchies were overthrown by revolutions.
- Introduction of the principles of equality and freedom.** Revolutionary France was the first state to grant universal male suffrage. The revolution was based on the Enlightenment ideas of liberty, freedom, and fraternity.

## Glossary of terms

**Council of Ancients** - The upper house of the legislature composed of 250 members (at least 40 years old) who voted on laws and were selected from 750 electors.

**Royalist** - People who sympathized with the monarchs and aimed to restore their power.

**Coup d'etat** - A French word which literally means a blow against the state. It usually involves military intimidation of the existing government.

**Directory** - The government during the French Revolution headed by 5 directors. The Council of the Ancient and Council of 500 served as its bicameral legislature.

**First Consul** - The title held by Napoleon Bonaparte under the Directory, the fourth revolutionary government during the French Revolution.

**Council of 500** - The lower house of the legislature consisted of large property owners (at least 30 years old) who proposed laws.

## Thinking Time

**Source A: Napoleon Bonaparte statement on the condition of France upon his return in 1799, stating that the Directors had messed up affairs during his absence when Napoleon was in Egypt, leading to his overthrow of the Directory on 18 Brumaire (Nov. 9) and the establishment of the Consulate, under which he ruled France until the Restoration of the Bourbons in 1814.**

“What have you done with this France which I left so brilliant? I left you peace, I find war. I left you victories, I find defeats. I left you the millions of Italy; I find the laws of spoliation and misery.”

What, according to Source A, were the difficulties of the Directory in governing France?

# Chapter 6 - The Directory and Napoleon, 1795-1807

## Important keywords

**Constitution of Year III**

**Directory**

**Coup d'etat**

**Sister Republics**

**Constitution of Year VIII**

**Consulate**

**Dictatorship**

**First Consul for Life**

**Code Napoleon**

**Emperor Of the French**

## Learning Standards:

### **Change, Continuity, and Context**

D2.His.3.9-12. Use questions generated about individuals and groups to assess how the significance of their actions changes over time and is shaped by the historical context.

### **Perspectives**

D2.His.7.9-12. Explain how the perspectives of people in the present shape interpretations of the past.

### **Historical Sources and Evidence**

D2.His.12.9-12. Use questions generated about multiple historical sources to pursue further inquiry and investigate additional source.

**Causation and Argumentation**

D2.His.17.9-12. Critique the central arguments in secondary works of history on related topics in multiple media in terms of their historical accuracy.

**Learning Objectives:****Learning Standard: Change, Continuity, and Context  
(D2.His.3.9-12)**

**Objective:** Students will use questions generated about key individuals and groups, such as the leaders of the Directory and Napoleon Bonaparte, to assess how the significance of their actions evolved over time and was influenced by the historical context, including the political, social, and economic conditions of France from 1795 to 1807.

**Learning Standard: Perspectives (D2.His.7.9-12)**

**Objective:** Students will explain how contemporary perspectives shape interpretations of the Directory and Napoleon's rise to power, considering how current values, beliefs, and historical knowledge influence our understanding of this period.

**Learning Standard: Historical Sources and Evidence  
(D2.His.12.9-12)**

**Objective:** Students will use questions generated from multiple historical sources, such as official documents, letters, and memoirs, to pursue further inquiry into the Directory and Napoleon era, investigating additional sources to gain a deeper understanding of the period.

**Learning Standard: Causation and Argumentation  
(D2.His.17.9-12)**

**Objective:** Students will critique the central arguments in secondary works of history on topics related to the Directory and Napoleon, including books, articles, and documentaries,

## 6.1 Establishment, aims and rule of the Directory

After the Reign of Terror ended, the Convention worked to keep things stable, and they made a new constitution in August 1795. This document, called the **Constitution of the Year III** or the **Constitution of 1795**, was finished quickly because of uprisings against the Thermidorian Convention. The goal of the new constitution was to end the revolution and include representative democracy, the rule of law, and a clear split between executive and legislative powers.

The **Directory** was set up under this new constitution. It also created a bicameral legislature with two parts: a lower house called the **Council of Five Hundred** and an upper house called the **Council of Ancients**. The Directory aimed to create a stable political system in France, which lasted from November 1795 to November 1799.



## Constitution of 1795

The **Constitution of Year III** protected individual rights, but these rights depended on **citizenship**. Voting rights had stricter rules than before. Citizens could vote only if they owned or rented property of a certain value, limiting the number of **electors** to 30,000. These electors chose the 750 members of the legislative bodies.

As the Directory was being established, **royalists** rebelled against it. General **Napoleon Bonaparte** and his forces stopped the revolt. To ensure the revolutionary effort was not reversed, the members of the Directory had to be former members of the Convention who had voted for the execution of **Louis XVI**.

## Aims of the Directory

- Prevent the return of the rule of the Bourbons
- Protect the positions of those who had supported the Revolution
- Strengthen republicanism

## Rule of the Directory

The **Directory** criticized the executions during the **Reign of Terror** but still supported **republicanism**. It became unpopular because of widespread corruption and poor management. The Directory's rule was filled with political schemes and plotting. Both the left (former **Jacobins** and **sans-culottes**) and the right (monarchists and conservatives) conspired against the government, so it relied heavily on the military to stay in power.

The Directory tried to handle the economic crisis and promised to end the system that fed **Paris** at the expense of all of **France**. However, food shortages continued in 1795, and a journalist named **François-Noël Babeuf** criticized the government's lack of action. Babeuf demanded the abolition of private property, common ownership, and the equal distribution of goods. His ideas were popular among former Jacobins and sans-culottes. As starvation continued in 1796, there were plots for a possible coup d'état to replace the Directory with an egalitarian and proto-socialist republic led by Babeuf. The Directory responded by arresting Babeuf and his close supporters, leading to his execution in May 1797.



François-Noël Babeuf

With its ineffective and questionable leadership, the new government faced an **economic crisis** and conspiracy but managed to survive. In 1797 (year V of the revolutionary calendar), the first elections under the new regime brought in inexperienced men, including 182 **royalists**, into the council. Former **Convention deputies** and **Jacobins** were not elected.

As royalist representation grew in the Directory, a **coup on 18 Fructidor year V** happened in Paris, led by three directors and several royalist deputies. The anti-Jacobin movement gained popularity in **Marseille** and **Lyon**. General **Lazare Hoche** supported the coup by sending his troops to Paris, but **Napoleon Bonaparte** countered it with his own army under General **Augereau**. Napoleon's army arrested the plotters, and many were exiled to \*\*French Guiana\*\*. Additionally, 42 opposition newspapers were seized.

Royalist members of both chambers were killed, and the elections were canceled. The Directory brought back

military tribunals to monitor the **émigrés** and their attempts to return to France. Similar to the deputies, non-jurying priests were persecuted.



**Illustration of the 18 Fructidor coup**

From this point on, the **Second Directory** manipulated elections to keep its power and reduce **royalist** gains. The **Jacobins** controlled the government. Suspected royalists were removed from the central administration and city governments. Laws against **émigrés** were strictly enforced, and military tribunals across the country judged returning **émigrés** as well as rebels and conspirators. Between 1797 and 1799, 160 people were sentenced to death. The **Church** and priests who refused to swear an oath to the government were also targeted. Many priests were deported to **French colonies**, and churches were either converted into temples or closed, forbidden from holding services.

Although violence during the Directory's rule was less than during the **Robespierre**-led Committee of Public Safety, political repression and terror were still present. This led to a decline in political prisoners and offenses in the final year of the Directory. However, by 1799, a political crisis was growing after the elections of new members of the **Council**.

The Directory was largely sustained by the ongoing revolutionary wars in Europe. In 1795-96, France's **Revolutionary Army** remained successful, advancing into Spain, Italy, and various German kingdoms. In 1797, the **Treaty of Campo Formio** was signed between **Napoleon** and the **Austrians**, granting France new territories. This was followed by the Directory's grand plan of establishing **Sister Republics** in Europe, which sparked a military alliance of European monarchies led by **Britain**, **Austria**, and **Russia**, including the **Ottoman Empire**, **Portugal**, **Naples**, various German monarchies, and **Sweden** against France.



France's **Sister Republics** had the same revolutionary values and goals as natural allies of France.

The **Directory** gained politically and economically from France's military success by taking resources and money from conquered territories. The French conquests also helped distract from the government's domestic failures. However, when the soldiers and ambitious generals returned to France, they would eventually overthrow the Directory in 1799.

## What were the strengths and weaknesses of the Directory?

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- The Constitution of Year III hindered dictatorship in the new government.</li><li>- Key opponents of the Directory were removed. Royalist causes were divided.</li><li>- The military was in support of the Directory, which overcame the challenges to authority.</li><li>- Revolutionary enthusiasm weakened and radical campaigns were reduced.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Annual elections meant less stability in the Directory</li><li>- The Directory relied on manipulating elections and military support in revolts and disputes.</li><li>- Interference in election results was questionable and undermined the legitimacy of the Directory.</li><li>- The Directory fed off the French conquests and military successes to support the national economy.</li></ul>

## What were the achievements and failures of the Directory?

ACHIEVEMENTS	FAILURES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The democratic system of government and constitutional rule were restored.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The <i>grandes écoles</i>, a system of elite centralized schools, was created.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The successes of the French armies laid the basis of conquest during the Napoleonic period.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The economy recovered relatively from the disruption caused by the Terror.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Internal plots and uprisings were suppressed with the aid of the military.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The first coalition against France was defeated. Territories were expanded and Sister Republics were formed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The Directory government was impaired by corruption, embezzlement of public funds and inefficient administration.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The Constitution of the Year III disenfranchised the majority of poor Frenchmen, which went against the revolutionary aim of providing democratic rights.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> It lacked confidence and increasingly depended on Napoleon Bonaparte in suppressing internal revolts and fighting foreign wars.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> It failed to reconcile the Catholic Church and the government of France.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Economic crisis became inevitable leading to inflation, poverty, famine and starvation.</li> </ul>

## 6.2 Military background and contributions of Napoleon Bonaparte including Toulon, the Italian Campaign and Egypt

During the early years of the Revolution, **Napoleon** was stationed in **Corsica**, where he fought against royalists, revolutionaries, and Corsican nationalists. He became a supporter of the **Jacobins** and committed himself to the Revolution. This led to a conflict with his mentor **Pasquale Paoli**, who actively resisted French rule in Corsica. In 1793, due to the split with Paoli, Napoleon and his family were forced to flee to the French mainland.

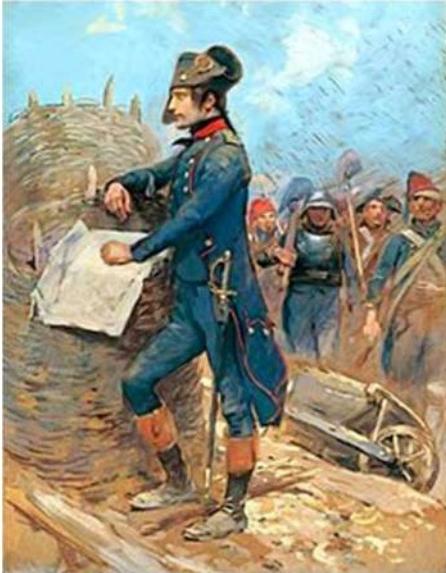


**Napoleon, aged 23**



Napoleon was acquainted with the brother of revolutionary leader Robespierre, Augustin, who supported him when he published a pro-republican pamphlet entitled ***Le souper de Beaucaire***.

With the aid of a fellow Corsican Antoine Christophe Saliceti, Napoleon was appointed artillery commander of the republican forces at the **Siege of Toulon** in 1793.



**Napoleon at the Siege of Toulon**



Napoleon earned the patronage of the **Directory** due to the defeat of the royalist insurrection.

### Austrian Italy 1796

In March 1796, Napoleon was given command of the **Army of Italy**. Under his leadership, the **Piedmont** forces were defeated in just two weeks. For the rest of the war, the

**French army** targeted the **Austrians**, defeating their relief efforts and winning the battles of Castiglione, Bassano, Arcole, and Rivoli. These victories caused the collapse of the Austrian position in Italy and led to the next phase of the campaign, focusing on the **Habsburg heartlands**.



### 1797 Italian campaign

#### Italian Campaign 1797

Another victory achieved by \*\*Napoleon\*\* was the signing of the **Treaty of Leoben** and the **Treaty of Campo Formio**.

France gained control of most of **Northern Italy** and the **Low Countries**. **Venice** was forced to surrender, ending 1,100 years of Venetian independence. This campaign further showcased Napoleon's military skills and increased his influence in French politics. With Napoleon's approval, the **French army looted Italy, raising huge funds**. Precious metals, jewels, paintings, and sculptures, including the *Horses of Saint Mark*, were also confiscated.



The French royalists reproached Napoleon's looting of Italy and warned that he might become a **dictator**.

## Egypt 1798

Hoping to establish a French presence in the Middle East **and weaken Britain's access to its trade interests in India**, Napoleon turned his attention to Egypt. In 1798, he organized a military expedition that included a group of 167 scientists, consisting of mathematicians, naturalists, chemists, and geodesists.



**Battle of the Pyramids on 21 July 1798 by Louis-François, Baron Lejeune**

On the way to Egypt, Napoleon captured an important naval base in **Malta**. The French army won the **Battle of Shubra Khit** and the **Battle of the Pyramids**.

However, in the **Battle of the Nile**, the British fleet destroyed most of the French fleet's ships.

While Napoleon established French power in Egypt, he faced constant resistance. He led an army into the Ottoman province of Damascus but failed to prevent the attacks. He then returned to Egypt with his army and decided to continue his career in France.

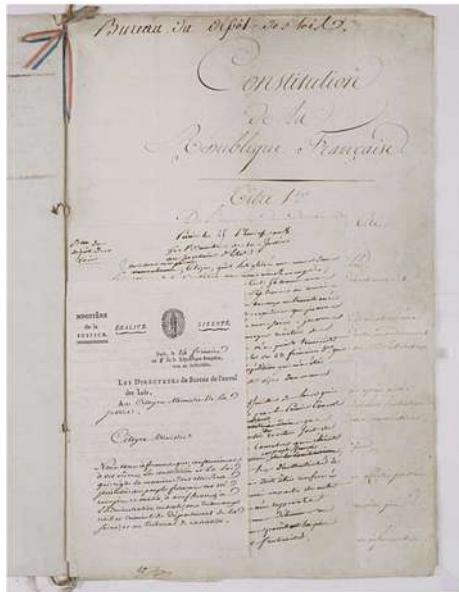
### 6.3 The coup of Brumaire and the establishment of the Consulate

Napoleon's popularity soared with his military victories. He earned prestige and respect from the Directory and all of France by successfully invading Italy and defeating the Austrian army. After his military campaign in Egypt, Napoleon returned to France as a hero. He initiated a coup that **Emmanuel Sieyès** had originally planned with him.

In November 1799 (Year VIII), Napoleon and his collaborators overthrew the Directory in the **Coup of 18 Brumaire**. He conspired with Sieyès, a Directory member who **opposed the Constitution of Year III** and the government. While planning the coup, Napoleon was designing his military dictatorship. He demanded constitutional changes, triggering a violent confrontation in the council. He was attacked, but the coup ultimately succeeded in his favor. The legislature was suspended for six weeks while the constitution was revised.

The coup ended the rule of the Directory. With the fall of the Directory, the plotters formed two commissions that established a provisional government with **Napoleon, Sieyès, and Ducos as Consuls**. Adopted in December 1799, the **Constitution of the Year VIII** created a new

government called the **Consulate**. Napoleon then consolidated his authority as the **First Consul**, surpassing the power of the other consuls and councils.



### Constitution of the Year VIII written by Sieyès

The new constitution gave executive power to the **three consuls**. However, in reality, the **First Consul** held all the power. This was different from all the previous revolutionary governments in France. An amendment to the constitution in 1802 made Napoleon **First Consul for Life**, and in 1804, with Napoleon becoming a **hereditary Emperor**, the **Bonaparte dynasty** was established.



The three consuls of the new government

## 6.4 Strengths and weaknesses of the new constitution

The **Constitution of the Year VIII** allowed for the creation of a government called the **Consulate**. While it appeared to be a republic to gain public support, in practice, it functioned as a **dictatorship**.

## Structure of the French Consulate

### First Consul

- shared executive power with two others
- appointed and dismissed ministers

### Council of State

- chosen by the First Consul
- acted as an advisory body
- nominated officials
- prepared draft legislation

### Senate

- 80 members nominated by the First Consul and appointed for life
- duty was to 'protect the constitution'
- advised the First Consul and drafted legislation
- selected deputies for the two bodies of the legislature from the **Notables**
- could override decisions made by the legislature through *senatus consultum*

## What were the strengths and weaknesses of the Consulate?

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- The new constitution reassured the support for the partisans of the Revolution.</li><li>- It established a strong top-down control of the government.</li><li>- All adult males were given voting rights.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- The 'rights of man' were not guaranteed.</li><li>- Voting rights of all Frenchmen were diluted by the multiple stages of voting.</li><li>- The constitution proposed a complex system, in which 1/5 of the 2 bodies of the legislature were to be replaced annually, but without clear provision.</li></ul>

**Amendments to the constitution gave immense powers to the First Consul**, helping Napoleon consolidate his authority. This effectively transformed the constitution into a **dictatorship**.

## 6.5 Napoleon's position and the state of France by 1799, establishment of the Consulship, and Napoleon's reforms as Consul

By 1799, the governing body in France was unpopular due to its inefficient administration and failure to address the **economic crisis**. By this time, the majority of the **Third Estate had achieved their goals** of improving their wealth and status. The spirit of the Revolution had weakened, and establishing security in the nation was now preferred.



**Napoleon Bonaparte as First Consul by Laurent Dabos**

The rise of the young general to fame was crucial for the demand for a new form of government. In 1799, Napoleon was in Egypt, trying to establish a French

presence in the Middle East, but he was not fully successful. Hearing about the chaos in the Directory, he returned to France with new ambitions. He aimed to advance his political career by joining the coup planned by Sieyès. Together, they overthrew the Directory and installed themselves as consuls along with Ducos. Sieyès initially intended for Napoleon to have minor power, but Napoleon eventually dominated the **consulship**.

Sieyès and Ducos only lasted two months as consuls in the new government. Jean Jacques Régis de Cambacérès and Charles-François Lebrun joined Napoleon as the two other consuls. Over the years, Napoleon made the other consuls and the Assemblies subservient to his rule. The Senate worked alongside Napoleon by drafting bills and advising him, while the Council of State and the two legislative bodies were given relatively unimportant roles.

### **How did Napoleon rule as First Consul?**

As the First Consul, Napoleon aimed for peace with Austria in 1801 and with Britain in 1802. The Austrians signed the **Treaty of Luneville** with France, reinforcing the earlier Treaty of Campo Formio. France signed the **Peace of Amiens** with Britain, ending the conflict between the two nations and briefly bringing peace to Europe.

With peace established with foreign enemies, Napoleon focused on administration in France. Under the rule of the Consulate, France experienced a period of reforms. Napoleon quickly moved to establish order and implement reforms based on his belief in social and economic liberty, while maintaining all political power in his own hands.

## Napoleon's reforms

### Class system

- Émigrés including aristocrats and Jacobins were allowed to return to France.
- New nobility was established through meritocracy such as the Legion of Honor.
- Peasants could keep lands bought from the Church and nobles.

### Finance and economy

- The French currency improved by creating the Bank of France.
- Prices were controlled.
- Industrial growth was encouraged, and the nation's infrastructure was strengthened.

### Ecclesiastical reform

- A **Concordat** was signed between France and Rome.
- The state assumed control over the appointment of bishops.
- The Pope recognized the Consulate in exchange for religious tolerance in France.

### Government and administration

- Rebellions in the French provinces were put down.
- A secret police led by Joseph Fouché was formed.
- The government of various French departments was centralized under a system of prefects.

### Legal and judicial reforms

- Law courts were brought under Napoleon's control.
- A uniform code of law was created with the **Code Napoleon**, which regulated all aspects of life including marriage, inheritance and property, and recognized equality before the law, freedom of thought, and the supremacy of the state.

## Educational changes

- The educational system was standardized and controlled by the government
- Education should conform to the Catholic Church and remain loyal to the State.

## The establishment and nature of the Empire in France

Napoleon was made First Consul for life in 1802, which was followed by a greater ambition: the restoration of the **French Empire**. This ambition grew in 1803 when strained Franco-British relations led to Britain's declaration of war on France.

The British government tried to remove Napoleon from power by supporting French royalists in plotting against his life consulate. When an assassination plot was foiled in 1804, it provoked a resurgence of opposition among the old aristocracy. The police chief **Fouché** advised Napoleon that to completely discourage conspiracy, the life consulate should be transformed into a hereditary empire. This would ensure that the Bonaparte dynasty would continue even after Napoleon's death.

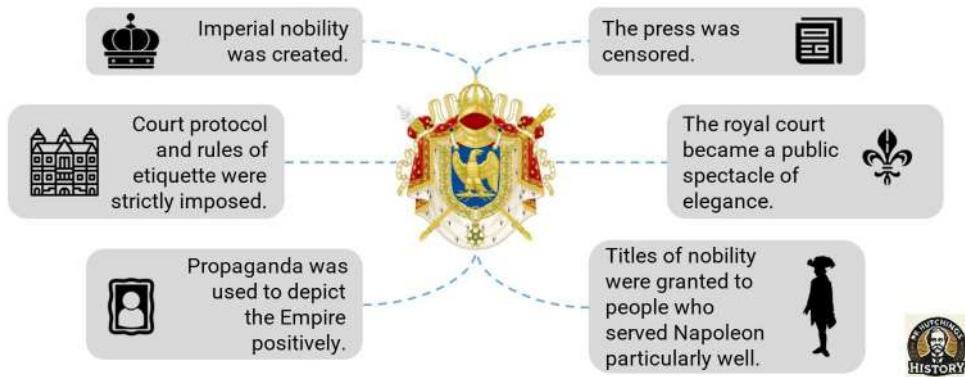


**Napoleon on his imperial throne**

Napoleon agreed with Fouche's advice. On 18 May 1804, he proclaimed himself **Emperor of the French** and his wife Josephine Empress. The coronation took place in Notre Dame on 2 December 1804 with Pope Pius VII officiating his consecration. The formation of the empire brought with it a wave of changes aimed at strengthening Napoleon's imperial regime.

## What were the changes when Napoleon was made Emperor?

In terms of the organization of the government of France, there were no significant changes made by Napoleon. However, several institutions similar to those of the Ancien Régime were reinstated.



## Glossary of Terms

**Constitution of Year III** - The French constitution of 1795  
that founded the Directory

**Directory** - The governing five-member committee in the French Republic from 1795 to 1799

**Coup d'etat** - The removal and seizure of a government and its powers

**Sister Republics** - The states set up in the 1790s by the invading armies of Revolutionary France

**Constitution of Year VIII** - The French constitution of 1799 that established the Consulate

**Consulate** - The French government established after the Coup of 18 Brumaire

**Dictatorship** - A form of government in which one person or a small group possesses absolute power without effective constitutional limitations

**First Consul for Life** - The title held by Napoleon Bonaparte from 1802 to 1804

**Code Napoleon** - The civil code of France, enacted in 1804 and officially designated in 1807

**Emperor Of the French** - The title held by Napoleon Bonaparte from 1804 to 1815

## Thinking Time

### Source A: Peter McPhee, historian, 2003

“The class-conscious bourgeois of the Thermidorian Convention and, after October 1795, of the Directory practised a politics of social consolidation which sought to recreate France in their own image. Desperate to avoid the twin perils of royalist counter-revolution and Jacobin popular democracy, the Directory pursued religious, military, economic and social policies which could rely at the local level only on a narrow base of support... By excluding royalists and the poor from the political process, and by restricting that process to electoral participation, the Directory sought to create a republican regime based on ‘capacity’ and a stake in society.”

### Source B: Georges Rudé, historian, 1971

“Napoleon had two different aspects. He believed in the overthrow of the old aristocracy of privilege; on the other hand, he believed in strong government—and he learned both of these beliefs from the Revolution. He was both an authoritarian and an egalitarian. Yet, admittedly little of this seems to fit the man who created a new aristocracy, who prided himself on being the son-in-law of Francis of Austria, referred to his late “brother” Louis XVI, and aspired to found a new imperial dynasty.”

### Source C: Memoirs of Madame de Remusat, 1880

“The belief, or rather the error, that only despotism could at that epoch maintain order in France was very widespread. It became the mainstay of Bonaparte; and it is due to him to say that he also believed it. The factions played into his

hands by imprudent attempts which he turned to his own advantage.”

**Source D: Joel T. Headley, historian, 1847**

“Napoleon's moral character was indifferent enough; yet as a friend of human liberty, and eager to promote the advancement of the race, by opening the field to talent and genius, however low their birth, he was infinitely superior to all the sovereigns who endeavored to crush him.”

**Option 1:** To what extent do you agree that Napoleon I's domestic policies significantly influenced French society? Use 2 sources and your own knowledge.

**Option 2:** Analyze the effects of Napoleon I's domestic policies on France. Use 2 sources and your own knowledge.

**Option 3:** Napoleon's military reputation was the key factor in his ascent to political power. Discuss. Use 2 sources and your own knowledge.

# Chapter 7 - The decline and fall of Napoleon, 1807-1815

## Important Keywords

**Continental System**

**Erfurt Convention**

**European Nationalism**

**Frankfurt Proposals**

**Hundred Days**

**Egalitarianism**

## Learning Standards:

### **Change, Continuity, and Context**

D2.His.3.9-12. Use questions generated about individuals and groups to assess how the significance of their actions changes over time and is shaped by the historical context.

### **Perspectives**

D2.His.8.9-12. Analyze how current interpretations of the past are limited by the extent to which available historical sources represent perspectives of people at the time.

### **Historical Sources and Evidence**

D2.His.13.9-12. Critique the appropriateness of the historical sources used in a secondary interpretation.

### **Causation and Argumentation**

D2.His.17.9-12. Critique the central arguments in secondary works of history on related topics in multiple media in terms of their historical accuracy.

## Learning Objectives:

### Learning Standard: Change, Continuity, and Context (D2.His.3.9-12)

**Objective:** Students will use questions generated about key individuals and groups, such as Napoleon Bonaparte and the coalition forces, to assess how the significance of their actions changed over time and was shaped by the historical context, including military, political, and economic challenges faced by France between 1807 and 1815.

### Learning Standard: Perspectives (D2.His.8.9-12)

**Objective:** Students will analyze how current interpretations of Napoleon's decline and fall are influenced by the limitations of available historical sources, which may not fully represent the perspectives of all people involved or affected by these events at the time.

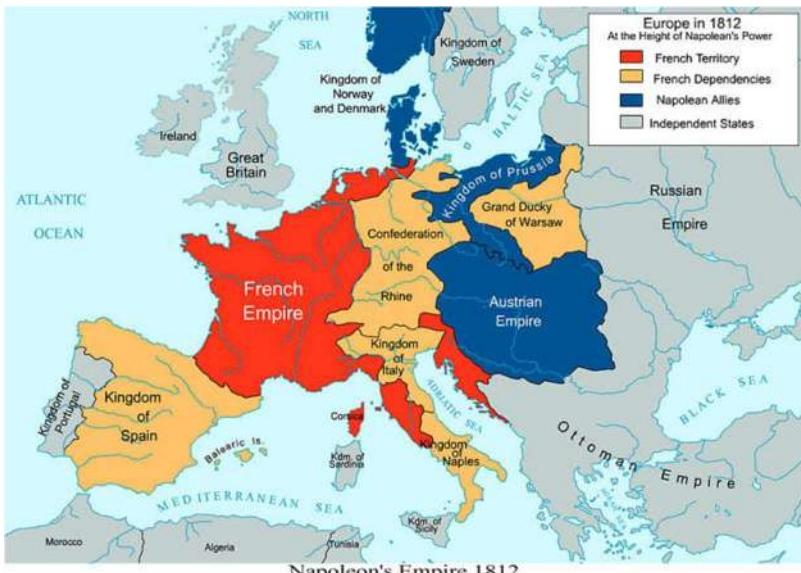
### Learning Standard: Historical Sources and Evidence (D2.His.13.9-12)

**Objective:** Students will critique the appropriateness of the historical sources used in secondary interpretations of Napoleon's decline and fall, evaluating whether these sources provide a balanced and comprehensive view of the events and figures involved.

### Learning Standard: Causation and Argumentation (D2.His.17.9-12)

**Objective:** Students will critique the central arguments in secondary works of history on Napoleon's decline and fall, including books, articles, and documentaries, assessing these arguments for historical accuracy and the evidence presented to support them.

## 7.1 Napoleon's rule in France after 1807, the campaigns of 1813-1815 and abdication, the Hundred Days, and personal failings and reasons for fall



### The French Empire in 1812

The **French Empire** grew through the **Napoleonic Wars**, with territories being conquered and annexed. This expansion fueled Napoleon's ambition to rule the continent. He dominated Europe through treaties, alliances, and victories in battle, securing his control over foreign nations by placing his relatives in power in Holland, Naples, and Sicily. During this time, the spirit of **nationalism** spread across Europe, inspired by the ideologies of the French Revolution.

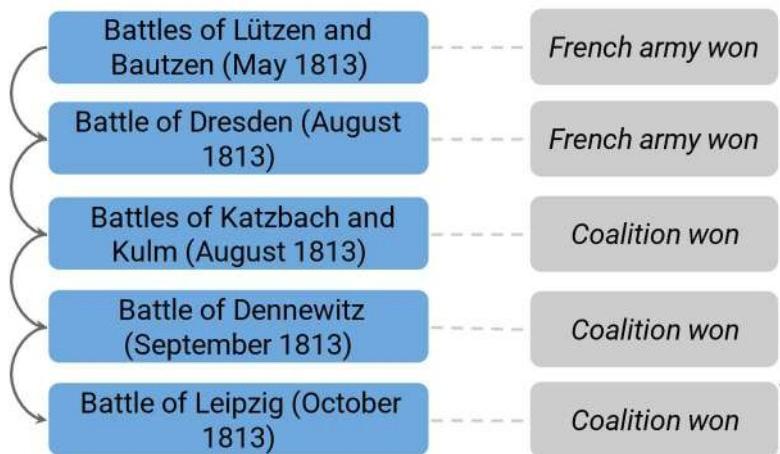
At the height of the French Empire in 1812, Napoleon ruled over 130 departments and 44 million subjects, had a large military presence in Germany, Italy, Spain, and the Duchy of Warsaw, and was allied with Austria and Prussia.

However, as European nationalism rose, Napoleon's popularity dwindled. His policies led to discontent in foreign states and compromised trade at home.

### The campaigns of 1813-1815 and abdication

In 1813, after the disastrous Russian campaign in 1812, a coalition of Austria, Prussia, Russia, Britain, Portugal, Sweden, Spain\*, and several German states formed against France. The **War of the Sixth Coalition** included major battles at Lützen, Bautzen, Dresden, and Leipzig. Napoleon managed to gather 350,000 troops, rebuild his force, and even inflict a series of defeats on the Coalition.

Major battles of the War of the Sixth Coalition:



The **Battle of Leipzig** was the largest battle in European history before the First World War. At the Battle of Hanau, the French army won but decided to return to France with heavy losses. In November 1813, the coalition offered peace terms in the **Frankfurt proposals**, which allowed Napoleon to remain Emperor of France but required the territories to be reduced to their natural frontiers. Napoleon refused to accept these terms.



Napoleon tried to reopen the **Frankfurt proposals** when the odds were against him in 1814.

Napoleon withdrew to France with his reduced army as the British armies closed in. While he won a series of victories in the **Six Days' Campaign**, the leaders of Paris surrendered to the coalition in March 1814. Persuaded to keep the nation safe in exchange for removing Napoleon from power, the Senate passed the **Emperor's Demise Act**, declaring Napoleon deposed.



**Napoléon abdicated in Fontainebleau**

Napoleon ordered his army to march on the capital, but his senior officers mutinied, believing the invasion of Paris to be impossible. On April 4, he was forced to abdicate in favor of his son, Napoleon, with Marie Louise as regent. Two days later, the coalition compelled him to announce his **unconditional abdication**, preventing him from reclaiming the French throne.

### The Hundred Days

According to the terms of the **Treaty of Fontainebleau**, Napoleon was exiled to Elba off the Tuscan coast. While in Elba, he kept busy by overseeing a small navy and army, and by supervising road construction, as well as the agricultural, legal, and educational systems of the island. In 1815, upon learning that he was about to be banished to a remote island in the Atlantic Ocean, he escaped from Elba with his men

and reached the French mainland at Golfe-Juan. At that time, his wife and son returned to Austria, and Louis XVIII of the Bourbons succeeded the throne.

Napoleon marched towards the capital with a growing army. Upon hearing of Napoleon's advance, Louis XVIII fled to Belgium, realizing his limited political support in France. Napoleon arrived in Paris and retook his position even after the **Quadruple Alliance** (Austria, Britain, Prussia, and Russia) declared him an outlaw at the Congress of Vienna.

This period of Napoleon's rule in France is known as the **Hundred Days**. Napoleon fought the coalition armies at the **Battle of Waterloo** in modern-day Belgium in June 1815 but was unable to defeat them. He returned to Paris and found himself in a precarious position once again.



**Napoleon's return from Elba**

He abdicated his position in favor of his son, fled to Rochefort and finally surrendered to the British.

### **Personal failings and reasons for fall**

Several factors contributed to **Napoleon's downfall**. While the early years of his rule were commendable, resistance to

his authority both abroad and at home grew during the later part of his reign, inevitably leading to his downfall.

- Ambition and power hunger** Napoleon's ambitions seemed limitless. He aspired to rule the whole of Europe, forcing his policies towards his conquests and territorial gains.
- European nationalism** The French revolutionary ideas inspired the spirit of nationalism across Europe. Nations raised their arms against Napoleon.
- Continental System** The blockade which was meant to weaken the British economy backfired on France. France's trade and economy were undermined.
- Peninsular War** Appointing his brother to rule over Spain proved to be a terrible decision. The victory of the insurrections diminished Napoleon's prestige.
- Arrest of the Pope** Refusing to comply with the Continental System, the Pope was imprisoned for years by Napoleon, angering Catholics all over Europe.
- Russian campaign** Napoleon suffered heavy losses in the Russian campaign. Several military officials abandoned him.
- War with Britain** The role of Britain was instrumental to Napoleon's downfall. It was superior in economy and navy and was behind the coalition forces against France.
- Alliance of European powers** The coalition of various European forces persisted until Napoleon was removed from power.

## 7.2 The condition of France in 1815 and Napoleon's reputation and legacy

By 1815, the French economy had significantly declined. The Napoleonic wars depleted resources, leading to economic problems such as unemployment, inflation, and starvation. Additionally, France was left isolated from the rest of Europe. When Napoleon abdicated in 1815, Louis XVIII was restored to power by the allies, putting an end to the wars. A harsher peace treaty was imposed on France, requiring a **war indemnity** and the presence of allied troops in France until it was paid.

Anti-Napoleonic sentiment in southern France resulted in the **Second White Terror**, where Napoleonic officials were purged from the government and executed, claiming 300 victims. While the Bourbons returned to power, the **egalitarianism and liberalism** that were products of the Revolution continued to influence French society.



**Louis XVIII**

### **Napoleon's reputation and legacy**

Military successes and conquests were key to Napoleon's rise to prominence. His rule was initially welcomed by the French people, but his policies, which served his personal ambitions, eventually became a burden to his subjects. To fully understand Napoleon's significance in the French Revolution and the French Empire, it is important to recognize both his accomplishments and failures.

**How was Napoleon's rule successful?**

Napoleon's rule was the first egalitarian dictatorship of the modern period.

Napoleonic reforms left a lasting mark on French institutions:

- Code Napoleon laid the foundation for much of France's legal and social system.
- Revolutionary institutions were consolidated.
- The French government was thoroughly centralized.
- The compromise with the Pope created a lasting settlement with the Church.
- The French Revolution ideals and achievements spread across Europe.

Napoleonic reforms helped to modernize Europe:

- Code Napoleon inspired the legal and social system of other European states.
- Serfdom was abolished in other parts of Europe.
- Germany was reorganized into 39 states.
- Prussia and Austria reformed their military for self-preservation.
- Nationalism grew stronger across Europe.

**What were the limitations of Napoleon's rule?**

- Individual liberty was repressed.
- Republicanism was overturned.
- Freedom of speech and women's rights were not a priority.
- People in the conquered states throughout Europe were oppressed.
- Napoleonic wars caused damage, huge loss and suffering.
- Labor policies favored the employers more.

## Glossary of Terms

**Continental System** - The blockade designed by Napoleon to weaken Britain through the destruction of British trade

**Erfurt Convention** - An agreement between France and Russia in 1808, which affirmed Russian support for France in case of war

**European Nationalism** - A movement promoting the interests of the nations that spread across Europe

**Frankfurt Proposals** - Peace terms offered to Napoleon after the War of the Sixth Coalition

**Hundred Days** - The period between Napoleon's return from exile on Elba to Paris and the second restoration of Louis XVIII in 1815

**Egalitarianism** - A philosophical perspective that emphasizes equality

## Thinking Time

### Source A:



### Source B: Napoleon Bonaparte, 1804

"Power is my mistress. I have worked too hard at her conquest to allow anyone to take her away from me."

### Source C: Walter Geer, historian, 1921

"It was not, however, until towards the end of his career that Napoleon gave way entirely to this spirit of domination. Then, seeing nations submit, and sovereigns bow before him, he no longer takes account either of men or of nature, and dares all, undertakes all."

**Source D: Ida Tarbell, investigative journalist, 1894**

“One may be convinced that the fundamental principles of his life were despotic; that he used the noble ideas of personal liberty, of equality, and of fraternity, as a tyrant; that the whole tendency of his civil and military system was to concentrate power in a single pair of hands, never to distribute it where it belonged, among the people; one may feel that he frequently sacrificed personal dignity to a theatrical desire to impose on the crowd as a hero of classic proportions, a god from Olympus; one may groan over the blood he spilt. But he cannot refuse to acknowledge that no man ever comprehended more clearly the splendid science of war; he cannot fail to bow to the genius which conceived and executed the Italian campaign, which fought the classic battles of Austerlitz, Jena and Wagram. These deeds are great epics. They move in noble, measured lines, and stir us by their might and perfection. It is only a genius of the most magnificent order which could handle men and materials as Napoleon did.”

**Option 1:** Assess the factors that led to Napoleon's military defeat. Use 2 sources and your own knowledge.

**Option 2:** British opposition was the most significant factor in the collapse of Napoleon I's empire. Discuss. Use 2 sources and your own knowledge.

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*Harold M. Hutchings*

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## Glossary

**Ancien Régime:** The political and social system in France before the Revolution of 1789.

**Bourgeoisie:** The middle class in society, who were often merchants or professionals.

**Congress of Vienna:** A conference of ambassadors of European states held in Vienna from 1814 to 1815, aiming to provide a long-term peace plan for Europe by settling critical issues arising from the French Revolutionary Wars and the Napoleonic Wars.

**Continental System:** Napoleon's foreign policy aimed at destroying Britain's trade by prohibiting European countries from trading with the UK.

**Estates-General:** The legislative body in France until 1789, representing the three estates of the realm: the clergy, the nobility, and the common people.

**Girondins:** A moderate political faction during the French Revolution.

**Guillotine:** A machine used during the French Revolution for beheading people.

**Jacobins:** A radical political group during the French Revolution.

**Legitimacy:** The political doctrine in the Congress of Vienna that restored pre-revolutionary rulers to their thrones.

**Napoleonic Code:** The French civil code established under Napoleon in 1804, officially known as the Civil Code of the French.

**National Assembly:** The elected legislature in France during the first part of the French Revolution, 1789-1791.

**Nationalism:** The strong belief that the interests of a particular nation-state are of primary importance, often leading to the desire for national advancement or independence.

**Sans-culottes:** Working-class Parisians who were radical revolutionaries; they were typically urban laborers or small shopkeepers.

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# About the Author

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Harold Hutchings is a resolute and enthusiastic history teacher with a wealth of experience and a strong academic background. He holds multiple Master's degrees in Educational Leadership, Teaching at the Secondary Level, and History, along with a Bachelor's degree in History with a foundation in Educational Theory and a Minor in Speech & Performing Arts. Harold is actively involved in professional societies including *Phi Alpha Theta* (ΦΑΘ), an American academic honor society for students and professors of history; *Kappa Delta Pi* (KDP), a professional honor society in education; and the *Organization of American Historians* (OAH), a professional society dedicated to the teaching and study of American history.

Harold's teaching career spans private parochial schools, public schools, and charter schools in Chicago, as well as private schools in Abu Dhabi, Doha, and currently in Kuwait. His experience covers American, French, British and International Baccalaureate (IB)curriculums. He is licensed as a teacher in Chicago, recognized as *Highly Qualified in History* by the Illinois Board of Education, and holds a second Professional Teaching License with a specialization in *Historical Perspectives* from the Indiana Board of Education in the USA.

Harold enjoys teaching in the Arab Gulf and is quite happy in Kuwait. In his spare time, he likes reading and spending time with his family. His commitment to education and diverse experiences makes him a valuable resource for students and colleagues, and he is excited to share his knowledge through his writing.



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